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Minnie
Caldwell

F. C. KOLBE, D. D.



MINNIE CALDWELL

AND OTHER STORIES,

PARTLY FOR GIRLS, AND PARTLY FOR THEIR ELDERS.

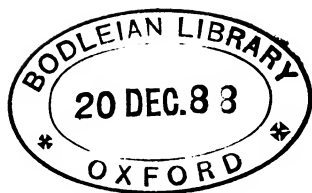
BY THE

REV. F. C. KOLBE, D.D.

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TO THE
CHILDREN OF MARY
IN CAPE TOWN,
FOR WHOM THESE STORIES WERE ORIGINALLY WRITTEN,
THEY ARE NOW AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
BY THE AUTHOR.

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MINNIE CALDWELL.

CHAPTER I.

Spiritual Surgery.

IN a town which we may suppose to be very like Cape Town, and at a time not very far distant, a girl, named Minnie Caldwell, aged say nineteen, was sitting in a little bow-windowed room, which had evidently been set aside for her peculiar possession. We might have called it a *boudoir*, if it were not that it was somewhat untidy. It is hard to say what she was doing. About an hour before she had finished "The Mill on the Floss," which was now relegated to the shelf containing her literary stock. It now stood alongside of Rodriguez' "Christian Perfection," a book beautifully bound and quite unsoiled, while on the other side was a much-used copy of Tennyson. A good number of yellow-backed novels neither improved the look of the case nor spoke well for the owner.

Minnie was sitting, then, with a half-worked slipper before her : yet she was not working. The miserable ending of "The Mill on the Floss" was still on her mind.

"There now," she said, after the fifth pretence of commencing to work, "why did I read that book? That George Eliot always makes me melancholy : it is so stupid,—as if I were not melancholy enough already."

Just then came a tap at the door,—“Please Miss, Father Moberley has called, and Missus says she is not feeling well, would you go down, please Miss?”

Minnie went down gladly ; anything for a change,—besides, she rather liked Father Moberley. She had met him once since his arrival, and his grave and kindly eyes had seemed to invite her confidence. “He’s just one of those men, you know, Mother” (she had said), “that a person can talk to. Father Cotton was always poking fun. I feel sure Father Moberley will talk sense.”

“Yes, my dear,” was the reply, “perhaps sometimes more sense than you would care for.”

“That’s not likely,” answered Minnie, with a shrug, “he’s too gentlemanly to be intrusive.”

My readers will have perceived that the Caldwells were well off, and that Minnie, the eldest, was something of a spoiled child. She had never had to do

any serious work, and it never occurred to her to undertake it voluntarily. Housework, she said, was for the servants, and there were plenty of them. Look after the little ones? Why, what was the nurse for? Moreover, she had never been plainly spoken to or rebuked, except in church; and that load she found easy to bear, when so many sinners had to bear it with her. Her parents were indulgent; her governesses had been deferential (she was now *vol-leerd**); the servants obsequious. Father Cotton, as she said, knowing her from infancy, had generally poked fun at her, and in the confessional had always been very gentle,—a good, kindly old priest, God rest his soul. So Minnie's life was an unruffled one: she might be as gay as she pleased, or she might be as melancholy, and everybody would humour her. It was in a melancholy mood, then, with a disposition to be communicative, that she tripped down to see Father Moberley.

Both Minnie and her mother had been right in seeing something out of the common in this priest. Priests differ among themselves as much as merchants, or any other class. But here and there you meet a man of whom you may say that

* A Dutch expression, common at the Cape; it means one who is supposed to have finished his education.

his vocation was stamped upon him by nature itself, as well as by grace. Father Moberley was one of these. To a ripe intellect he added great moral courage, together with all the manliness arising from an excellent physique. Moreover,—but he will be best seen in his words and deeds.

“How do you do, Miss Caldwell? So you are not out walking this bright day? I hope I have not interrupted you in any serious occupation?”

“No indeed, Father,” said Minnie, with a slight conscious blush at the emphasis laid on the word *serious*. “I was only sitting over this slipper; in fact, to be honest, I was only pretending to work even at that.”

“Thinking, then, I suppose? A penny for your thoughts.”

“Do you mean you really want to know them?”

“Certainly I do.”

“Well, you may have them for what they are worth. I was only brooding over melancholy impressions. I get tired of reading, tired of thinking, tired of building castles in the air. Indeed, Father Moberley, there are times when I do believe I am the most wretched being on earth.”

“Ah! well, I daresay you are not far wrong,” was Father Moberley’s grave reply.

“Why, what do you mean Father?”

There was a rising flush of mingled disappointment, surprise, and incipient anger on Minnie's face as she said this ; she had not meant to be taken at her word ; it was only a feeler thrown out for some of that sympathy which, she felt sure, was stored up in Father Moberley's heart ; and now to be told calmly from without that she, Minnie Caldwell, was not improbably the most wretched being on earth,—really it was too bad ! And that, too, from the man who, she had been so sure, was “too gentlemanly to be intrusive !”

“ I suppose you want to be soothed and flattered a bit : you want me to find it impossible to conceive how you can be unhappy with your resources and surroundings. But I assure you I do think your lot most wretched, and am glad you sometimes feel it so. You don't earn your bread, do you ? ”

“ No indeed, Father,” said Minnie, rather defiantly ; “ it was never necessary for me to do so.”

“ Oh ! well, you know, it is not always necessary to wait for necessity. However, I suppose at least you make your own dresses ? ”

“ No, I don't,” with an involuntary twitch at a piece of peacock-blue filoselle she had in her hand.

“ I see,” said Father Moberley, with a glance at the dainty slipper she was working at ; “ you scorn

the useful, and expend your energy on the æsthetic and ornamental. Well, you will be of some little use, once in four years or so, when we have a bazaar. Do you think now, suppose all your servants were to leave to-morrow, you could go down to the kitchen and provide for the family, or would you mother have to do it, ill as she is ? ”

“ How can you make such horrid suppositions, Father ? ”

“ Well then, leave suppositions and take realities: there are the children,—I wonder if their little eyes brighten with joy when Minnie comes down to have a daily romp with them in the nursery.”

“ I never go to the nursery : I hate children, and children hate me.” Minnie’s temper was certainly rising.

“ Possibly then your time is taken up with devotions. I have not seen you in church during the week, but there may be reasons for that.”

The temper was somewhat corrected by a touch of contrition, as Minnie replied, “ I know I am very wrong, Father : but I wish you would not be so sarcastic.”

The appeal was seemingly thrown away, for Father Moberley pitilessly went on,—“ Then, as a last resort, I am driven to the conclusion that you take the intellectual line. If reduced to poverty

to-morrow, you could, doubtless, make a living by writing or teaching?"

"Teaching, certainly not: perhaps I could write."

"I see; you never tried, but you think perhaps some lucky inborn inspiration would carry you through. In fact your one end and attainment in life is to be a 'lady,'—an unsubstantial being, partly goddess, partly tyrant, waited on by admirers and servants."

"Now you are really too hard, Father Moberley."

"Is the truth too hard for you? My dear Miss Caldwell, let us tear away all unrealities: think of it candidly,—wherein is your life better than, say, a loafer's? Now don't be shocked: listen to me. You do nothing, nor does he: you live for yourself alone, so does he: he is a nuisance to himself and others, and so at times are you. The only difference between you seems to be that he, by his discomfort, does some penance for his idleness, and you do not."

Minnie's anger was fully roused by this time: she started up,—“Of course, Father Moberley, you as a priest have a right to say much, where it would be unbecoming in me to answer. I can only say that you have used your privilege to the full, and even if you have more to say, I don't mean to stop to hear it.”

So saying, she swept magnificently out of the room, carrying the slipper with her, but leaving her basket of materials behind her. She went back to her little room and (of course) cried. Her reflections were too bitter to put into words.

When she had left, Father Moberley, no more vexed at her rude dismissal of himself than a dentist is at his patient's wrath, stooped over her basket and snipped off a piece of the æsthetic peacock-blue, saying to himself, "This may be a trophy some day."

His reflection as he left the house was,—“Strange girl that! but there's lots of good in her: with a little judicious surgery we may make something of her yet.”

CHAPTER II.

The treatment begins to take effect.



MINNIE, as I was saying, sat and cried, but not for long. She soon rose and put an end to her tears, with a stamp of defiant resolution,—“She should do what she liked, how she liked, and when she liked, in spite of all the Father Moberleys in the world,—” and the prayers she said that night were gone over with a very uneasy conscience. Next morning after breakfast, having no new novel to read, she thought she might as well finish the slipper. Her brother Alfred was going to college soon, and they were for him. So with an air of business she went up to her own domain. On the way little Carrie met her with a slate in her hand, and a woe-begone expression on her face: “Oh, Minnie, please show me how to do this sum. Mamma is ill, and can’t help me.”

“Why don’t you learn to do these things yourself?” said Minnie; and taking the slate she

dashed off the answer far too quickly to be accurate.

"But," said Carrie, ruefully, "that's just what I get, and it's wrong."

"Well, if you don't like it, leave it. What do you come bothering me for? I can't spend my whole morning over your sums."

Poor Carrie's distress was greater than ever, and she could not understand why Minnie's temper was so near the surface this morning. Nor could Minnie herself. It wasn't Father Moberley,—oh, no, not a bit. She was quite indifferent about that, quite. She had made up her mind not to care, and she wouldn't. Still, when she got to her room, and couldn't find her work-basket, again it wasn't Father Moberley that made her throw things about, and say what a horrid nuisance servants were, always meddling and putting things where no one could find them; and of course it had nothing to do with Father Moberley when her language sounded like a quotation from her brother Alfred,—oh, dear, no! It was only after the outburst was all over that Minnie remembered where she had left the basket down in the drawing-room; so down she went, feeling as aggrieved as if both Carrie and the servants had been really injuring her after all. But when she reached the

spot, and last evening's interview came vividly before her again, the phantom Carrie and the servants were changed into the real grievance, Father Moberley, about whom she had resolved "not to care a bit." And recalling the scene, especially the sarcastic words about preferring the ornamental and æsthetic, in an angry impulse, no longer restrained by others' presence, she hurled the basket from her straight across the room.

They tell me that this Minnie of mine is an impossible character,—that girls of nineteen never get so angry when they are alone as to hurl baskets and things across the room. I can't help it. My Minnie is someone quite special, and if she is impossible so much the better, for then none of my readers will think I mean *them*. Well, Minnie, whether an impossible girl or not, certainly threw her basket with a good deal of force. She was just at that point of anger where it is possible to become half-amused at our own violence, and this half-amusement was not checked by the fact that the drawing-room door opened at the same time, and the old offender, the ball of peacock-blue, glancing off the edge of the sofa, nearly hit her brother Alfred on the nose.

"Hullo, Minnie! you *are* going it this morning, and no mistake!"

The sense of amusement had by this time risen so high, that the mists of anger remaining were at once scattered by Alfred's good-humoured face and cheery voice.

"What's the matter, old girl? Got out of bed on the wrong side this morning?"

"No, Alf; I think I must have got in on the wrong side last night."

"Why, what's up?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Humph! a pretty good row to make about nothing, then. If that ball had been made of anything, it would have spoiled my beauty, I can tell you."

"Well," said Minnie, with a laugh, "it wasn't exactly nothing, you know; but somebody stroked me up the wrong way, when I expected to be stroked down, and I got a bit ruffled in consequence,—that's all."

"Oh, if that's all, you'll survive it, let's hope. But, I say, Min," he continued, more seriously, "take a look round and see mother. I fear she's really ill."

Minnie's conscience smote her: this was the fourth time she had been told her mother was unwell. She had supposed it was merely one of her frequent headaches and had not even inquired

about her. She felt that Father Moberley's description of her selfishness was being unpleasantly verified, and close upon this reflection came the memory of Carrie's troubled face to emphasise it; so she penitently gathered up the basket's scattered contents, and went up to her mother.

Mrs. Caldwell was seriously ill, the doctor said, as he met Minnie on the stairs; she would require careful attention. So with her tenderest manner made more tender by the gush of penitent love, she kissed her mother's fevered forehead, smoothed the clothes, and made the pillows more comfortable. Mrs. Caldwell opened her eyes and faintly said: "It is so kind and thoughtful of you to come, Minnie."

"No, Mamma," said Minnie, kneeling down by the bedside, and taking her mother's hand, "don't say that. I am sorry to say I had quite forgotten you. If it had not been for Alfred I should not have come at all."

"Never mind, darling, what brought you; the mere sight of you about me will do me more good than all the doctor's medicines."

And so Minnie was established as nurse, and learned the new joy of being of some use in the world. One night Mrs. Caldwell was so ill that it was necessary to watch. It was the first night of

watching Minnie had ever spent. She felt it was a solemn time as the hours passed slowly away. Her mind was very active, and among the things she thought of was that conversation with Father Moberley,—this time not in anger, yet not altogether in penitence. She was penitent towards her mother and towards the children, but she still proudly insisted that Father Moberley had no right to say what he did. Yet the good in her was so far uppermost that she made various resolutions. Towards morning the favourable symptoms looked for by the doctor appeared: the crisis was over, and from that time Mrs. Caldwell gradually improved.

Shortly after her release from the sick-room, Minnie appeared one day in the nursery. It was like an apparition. Carrie looked up with a not very pleased surprise; Basil, a sturdy little lad of eight, stopped in the middle of a laugh. Having a clear conscience, however (for a wonder), he had the presence of mind to turn towards little Lilian, fillipping his finger with an impressive “Hoo-ha-ha!”—equivalent in their infantile language to the vague threat, “Won’t you just catch it now!” Lilian ran in undefined terror to nurse, and making a shield of her apron protested, “Lilian wasn’t naughty, was she?” Doubtfully she said it, for

her experience of Minnie had been that one could be very naughty indeed without ever meaning it.

But what brought Minnie there? Had Father Moberley won the victory after all? Was Minnie going to be as good as gold, like the girls in the story-books, and never be naughty any more? I fear not. She had not forgiven Father Moberley; she had simply in her mind determined that she would put it out of any man's power to say anything like that to her again.

It was some little time before the little ones were really persuaded that her errand was peace, but Minnie cut out such delightful little men from paper, eight at a time, and then spread them out all in a row holding hands, and then drew such wonderful horses and carts on the slate, that Lilian's suspicion changed into blind confidence, and, ere long, with her little sister on her lap, Minnie was telling a marvellous tale. Basil's eyes and Lilian's mouth opened wider and wider as the hero got into difficulty after difficulty, until at last, when all escape seemed utterly impossible, their little minds were struck with awe at the wondrous climax,—“and then by a super-conglomeration of concatenations he escaped.”

Minnie's triumph was complete. The grand

question was, when was she coming down to tell them another story ?

“ Now, Father Moberley, I shall be able to make the little eyes sparkle without you,” was Minnie’s reflection. Nevertheless the process was undeniably pleasant, more pleasant than she had expected ; and Basil and Lilian were not the only ones who looked forward to the next nursery visit.

CHAPTER III.

Whereupon, in spite of improving symptoms, it is continued.

HER mother's illness had initiated a great change in Minnie, and that illness was now followed by a lingering weakness which necessitated the continuance of the change. Hitherto she had depended on others for everything ; now, having begun to act for herself, all her dormant energies were set in motion. Meanwhile, however, her religious life was not flourishing. Her ordinary time for confession had passed some weeks unheeded. Mrs. Caldwell seemed completely puzzled ; but then Minnie always was a puzzle, so they let her go her own way as before. She had evidently conceived the idea of making Father Moberley alter his views regarding her, and that without giving up her own notions. Why, for instance, should he have spoken so sneeringly of the ornamental and æsthetic ? Weren't the vestments of the Church themselves ornamental and

æsthetic? She knew what she should do ; she would spend money, time, and energy (for she had the ability), and make a beautiful set of Mass-vestments, and that would silence her critic for ever. The next day Father Moberley received a little note which said :

“Miss Caldwell presents her compliments to the Rev. Father Moberley, and begs that he would be so kind as to tell her which colour of vestments is most needed in the Church, as she has the intention of employing some of her *idle time* [very much underlined] in making a set.”

With a grim smile Father Moberley returned by the bearer the following answer :

“The Rev. William Moberley presents his compliments to Miss Caldwell, and begs to inform her that there is an Altar Society meeting on Thursday afternoons at four o'clock. There is a good deal of stitching and mending to do, without making superfluous vestments. The Rev. William Moberley would be glad to see Miss Caldwell at this Society, behaving like an ordinary being, and not acting on wild impulse.”

Minnie took her rebuff better than might have been expected. Immediately after sending her letter, she had felt it to have been a mistake ; and the formality of it, together with the underlining of

idle time, was rather *cheeky*, she told herself. She had a strong sense of justice; so simply called herself "a silly," for laying herself open to such a rebuff, and for putting herself under what was, to her mind, a kind of obligation to go to this stitching society.

Her appearance there on the following Thursday caused almost as much wonder as her nursery visit had done.

"Dear me, Miss Caldwell!" said one of the members advancing, who was known as Mrs. Fussy, and who never spoke without emphasising several words, "this *is* an unexpected pleasure *indeed*."

"Is it?" said Minnie.

"I never knew, Miss Caldwell, that you were a Child of Mary."

"Nor did I," said Minnie.

"And *may* I ask what prompted you to join *our* number, Miss Caldwell?"

"No, you mayn't," said Minnie, with continued laconic reserve.

"Come now, Miss Caldwell, you are trying to be *funny*, you know."

"No, indeed, I *am* not. I have simply come on invitation here to stitch and darn, and I have not come to be catechised, Mrs. Fussy." Thus Minnie was installed, though not a Child of

Mary, in this Society, which was an off-shoot of that Sodality,—an origin which explains Mrs. Fussy's question. Hitherto, though there was no rule to that effect, all the members were either past or present Children of Mary,—the married ladies feeling glad thus in some measure to keep up their connection with the Sodality they all loved so much.

Minnie proved a useful member, for she worked away and did not care to talk much. She was not popular with other girls; she often used to shut them up just as she used to shut up the otherwise irrepressible Mrs. Fussy. So, as few spoke to her, she worked away in comparative silence. When Father Moberley looked in casually that afternoon, he made a general bow all round. Some waited in hopes of getting an explanation of Minnie's presence, a problem which was sorely exercising their minds; but Father Moberley was as mysterious as she. After chatting to some of them, he simply said, as he passed her chair, "You're welcome here, Miss Caldwell."

Minnie was just finishing a seam; she snipped off the thread, looked up, and answered, "Thank you, Father."

But Father Moberley noticed that the scissors snapped a little more emphatically than was necessary, and there was also just the trace of an

expression on her candid face which revealed to him that her thought was, "I have scored one this time, at least." She would have scored one certainly, but for that expression, for her last move quite puzzled Father Moberley. Now she had betrayed her plan. "Aha! Miss Minnie," thought he, "so you want to convert me, instead of my converting you, is that it? Well, I accept the challenge; I have the grace of God on my side anyhow."

It was not long before Father Moberley made it his business to call again at the Caldwells. You would not have thought he had any special plan in view, if you had heard his animated discussion with Mr. Caldwell on astronomy. Mr. Caldwell was an ardent amateur, and had erected a little observatory on the top of the house, "just over Minnie's own private room, you know, Father," as our little friend Carrie had said in describing the mystery to Father Moberley a short time before,—thereby incidentally revealing the fact that Minnie *had* a private room. I do not say that Father Moberley did not care for astronomy, but certainly he seemed to get more excited to-day over azimuths and equinoxes than he had ever done before, until at last a point was started which could only be settled by reference to the actual observations, and this necessitated a visit to the observatory.

"You are also an astronomer in a small way, Miss Caldwell?"

And so Minnie was drawn into the conversation, at the very moment of her congratulating herself on being able to escape without a *tête-à-tête*. The point was settled up in the observatory, and Father Moberley was proved wrong, as he had expected, for this star-gazing of his was only a ruse to gain an opportunity for more surgery. As they descended, merrily laughing over the defeat and victory, Father Moberley stopped suddenly at the door of the room just under the observatory, and remarked, "Your *boudoir*, I believe, Miss Caldwell?"

"Yes, Father, how did you know?"

"Oh, a little bird told me. May I go in?"

"Oh, no, please not: I'd much rather you didn't."

"Your word would be law to anyone else, but a priest is a privileged person,"—and he walked in, nearly trod on the peacock-blue ball on the floor, took a comprehensive glance all round, swept the bookcase with his eyes, then turning to the window said, "Capital view outside, isn't there?"

Minnie felt there was something very suggestive in the word *outside*, but hoping his short glance had not taken in much simply assented.

"I wanted specially to go in there," said Father Moberley, as they returned to the drawing-room,

"because I have a theory on behalf of which I make as many observations as possible."

"What *is* the theory?" asked Mr. Caldwell; "if there is one thing I like, it is working out new theories."

"It's hardly new," replied Father Moberley; "it merely is that I believe when a person has a room entirely under his control, that room is an exact reflex of the owner's soul."

"Good," laughed Mr. Caldwell; "then Minnie must have an uncommonly mixed-up kind of a soul."

Minnie laughed and blushed, but neither with amusement nor with pleasure. She had certainly not scored one this time, not having anticipated the war being carried so far into her own country. However, partly because she wanted to know how much damage had been done, partly for the same reason that a moth goes on singeing its wings in a flame, she bluntly asked Father Moberley, as she followed him into the hall:

"And was your theory verified?"

"I can't tell yet. The room spoke plainly enough; if your soul would speak equally plainly, I could then see if they corresponded."

"Do you think, then, that I am deceiving you, Father?" said Minnie, firing up slightly.

"Oh dear no; only one can get inside a room

and look round easily enough; it's not so easy to get inside a person's soul."

"But what did my room tell you so plainly?"

"Well, let me give you a specimen or two. Have you not given orders to the servants to sweep and dust, but not to alter any of the arrangements; and woe betide them if they break your orders?"

"Yes," said Minnie, "but someone must have told you; the room didn't."

"I beg your pardon; I learnt it there, and nowhere else."

"But how?"

"Never mind. Tell me again now, is not that room so exclusively yours, that the children dare not set foot there for fear of their lives? Was Carrie ever there?"

"Yes, she was, Father," said Minnie, glad to be able to say something for herself, however little. Still she scorned to exaggerate, even in her own favour, so she added, "It was only last week though, and it was for the first time."

"Ah, then my inferences were pretty correct. Shall I tell you the rest? For instance, how much space yellow-backed fiction occupies, and poetry, and sentiment,—and about a small quantity of decorously bound, but very little used, piety, which, by the way, has been almost pushed behind the

shelf by 'The Mill on the Floss,' the story of a girl who *tried to be good by her own efforts and failed*. Must I go on about the reign of disorder, and the prevalence of caprice, and the absence of——?"

"That's enough, Father," interrupted Minnie, feeling very sore, "I wish I hadn't asked you now."

"Well, must I continue my observations? Must I, too, set up a little observatory over your room, and examine your soul with telescope and microscope?"

"Oh no: please leave me alone. The only 'scope' that would suit me, I fear, is a kaleidoscope."


"But even that is a thing of beauty, and acts according to regular laws——"

"Which my soul isn't and doesn't, I suppose? I had better say good-bye, Father, you are beginning to say nasty things again."

I have written in vain if my readers have not noticed a strong love of truth, and a keen sense of justice in Minnie Caldwell. Father Moberley had inwardly rejoiced over it, when she made that admission about the children, and he thought to himself, "Now that straightforwardness of hers is her saving quality. I shall make it the basis of my next move, and it will go hard, please God, if she is not checkmated by it."

CHAPTER IV.

With complete success.

Y none of the Caldwell household were Father Moberley's visits more looked forward to than by Basil, who had a most insatiable appetite for stories. Minnie, indeed, kept him supplied with heroes, and giants, and dragons, and all that. But of course, as he used patronisingly to explain to Lilian, "they aren't real people you know, it's only make-believe." It was all the same to Lilian: the even tenor of her life was not disturbed by the thought that on the other side of the hills there was a big, big giant, who had a little girl for breakfast every morning,—as long as he remained on the other side of the hills. Only one day her little spirit was moved to inquiry; and, wanting to know if her own morning walks were quite safe, she ventured to ask, "if those big, horrid, ugly giants ever came so far as this for their breakfast?" And this was the question that first provoked Basil's explanation. So

that there was plenty of spice about Minnie's stories ; but even Basil felt that they did not give much solid food. Now Father Moberley told stories also, but his were always true ones, and he told them in such a way that they well bore repeating. Of all of them—they were mostly from Holy Scripture—Basil's favourites were the story of "Jophez," as he persisted in calling Joseph, and the rebellion of Absalom. Father Moberley was in the middle of the latter one day, when he happened to mention what Holy Scripture says of Achitophel, that before dying he put his house in order.

"Do people always put their houses in order when they are going to die, Father?" asked Basil.

"Well, Holy Scripture sometimes says they did."

"Then I think Minnie must be going to die."

I am sorry to say that at this juncture, Minnie kicked her little brother under the table. But what is the use of a hint to a candid child?

"I wish you wouldn't kick me Minnie," was his only rejoinder ; "I wasn't doing anything."

"Why," said Father Moberley, laughingly, "has Minnie been putting her house in order?"

"Yes," eagerly shouted Basil and Lilian together ; and out the whole story came, Minnie kicking and frowning in vain: how the whole room

had been routed out, and the children had been called in to help, "and you know, Father, it's quite different now; it isn't higgledy-piggledy now any more, like what it used to be; and you know, Father, *we* can go there now, and Minnie tells us stories."

On the Thursday following, Father Moberley called in at the Altar Society Meeting, and took the opportunity of saying to Minnie:

"I was glad to hear what the children were saying the other day." (Minnie said nothing.) "You are brightening up their little lives very much." Still silence: then in a lower tone he added, "Inasmuch as you did it unto one of these little ones, you did it unto Me!"

So saying, he turned and took his leave. But as he reached the door, Minnie overtook him; "Father," she said, "you are mistaken in me: you are attributing to me motives I never had."

"How so, my child?"

"Oh, I don't know, Father; I am not good at all. You have certainly stung me into greater activity, and my self-love has been keenly wounded by what you have said to me with too much truth, but I am not really better at heart, and I don't want you to think it."

"Look here, Miss Caldwell," he replied, "shall I tell you the whole state of the case? For some

time back you and I have been having a trial of strength. I have been trying to win you to a better belief in God ; and you have been trying to win me to a better belief in Minnie Caldwell: which of us do you think ought to gain the day ? ”

“ Would you have me try to show you how bad I am, then, Father ? ” said Minnie, with just a touch of reaction.

“ No, but there is this that surprises me, Miss Caldwell ; how is it that you are so very ready to confess to man, and so very slow to confess to God ? ”

“ I know what you mean, Father, ” answered Minnie, dropping her eyes after a glance of inquiry ; “ I shall not delay any longer. I will try to be really good now, indeed I will. Good-bye. ”

Father Moberley smiled to himself, thinking, “ Right again. I thought over-praise would cut deeper than over-blame. I thought she was too straightforward to stand that. ”

Minnie was as good as her word: the right resolutions were at length taken, the right things were done upon the right motives. She resumed her neglected habits of devotion, and gladdened the hearts of all who knew and cared for her. She was still at times rather curt when dealing with her equals, and impracticable when dealing with her

superiors ; but towards the children and the servants, she was uniformly gentle and kind. Whatever ungentleness or unkindness she had shown before, had proceeded from thoughtlessness, not ungenerosity ; and now that she had begun to think, her generosity had full play. In fact even towards her superiors and equals she was much improved. Her mother often found her pliable, when she had expected resistance ; and twice at least she was known to have stood Mrs. Fussy for a full quarter-of-an-hour without a single sarcasm. It was with great joy, then, that Father Moberley watched the progress of this soul. He knew well that if she once turned the full powers of her nature towards God, a most beautiful life would be the result. Two things were wanting, Integrity and Permanence. So, soon after seeing her fairly started on the right track, he asked her one day, if she should like to become a Child of Mary. Yes, she said, she should : she had not ventured to ask, for fear of being refused.

The Directress of the Children of Mary was Sister Mary Germaine, who had had the teaching of Minnie in her earlier years. Her face, when Minnie's name was proposed, was a study. She had every confidence in Father Moberley's judgment, but—Minnie Caldwell!

"Why," she said, "she was the most self-willed, undisciplined girl in the whole school ; and, from what I hear of her, has led a most worldly life ever since."

"People change sometimes," suggested Father Moberley.

"Yes, of course," said Sister Mary Germaine ; I am not putting obstacles in her way ; only I prophesy we shall have trouble with that girl yet if we admit her."

"Is it not worth while putting up with a little trouble, in order to do a great deal of good?"

"Certainly, if the good gets done."

"Well, I take the responsibility entirely on my own shoulders."

"Then let her come to the next meeting as an Aspirant. We'll give her a long probation, though ; otherwise she will be giving herself airs, perhaps."

"Be that as you please, Sister, but I guarantee that Miss Caldwell is good for more than many of your best."

Sister Germaine externally acquiesced, but felt sure that that awful minx had been throwing dust in the eyes of the worthy Father : if he only knew girl-nature as she did,—however we should see.

In spite of Sister Mary Germaine's foreboding, the long probation was faithfully passed through ;

the long-looked-for Feast of the Immaculate Conception came, and it was with more than usual gladness that Father Moberley placed on Minnie's neck the blue ribbon, with the medal that marked out Mary's special children.

And now I fancy I hear some of my readers say, "I thought so: it's just like those old moral stories, 'and then became a Child of Mary, and never did anything wrong again ;' why, it's as bad as those novels which finish up with, 'and then they were married, and lived happily ever after.'" But wait a moment, dear reader ; my tale is not an old moral story, nor is it a novel ; so you must just let me go my own way. Everybody knows that marriage is not a short cut to happiness ; in fact it is often, I had almost said generally, precisely with marriage that the whole bother begins. So also, becoming a Child of Mary, I need not say, is not tantamount to stepping at once into heaven. Many will say that it was only after becoming Children of Mary that they began to find it difficult to be good. Here was Minnie, acting under the strong impulse of a new and powerful personal influence, taking good resolutions with God's grace and in her first fervour. Who shall say how long it will last ? I am sure I said nothing about it. I know ; but I am not going to

tell yet. Perhaps Sister Germaine was right after all, perhaps she wasn't. At all events, don't call my tale goody-goody until you have heard it all out.

CHAPTER V.

Relapse.



HERE is a saying, "Happy is the people that has no history." This is true of individuals also, and indeed it would have been better for Minnie Caldwell if she had had none. Had she lived a pure, quiet, obedient life, I could hardly have made it interesting to my readers, however full of interest it might have been to the angels. Confess, now, does not the whole interest of my tale, if it has any, come from Minnie's waywardness and resistance to grace. So now that she has become good, I find at once that she ceases to have a history. One day is as like another as two peas. She seemed to go by clock-work. It is much better so, I say, and I only wish I could close my book now, and say simply that Minnie went on living to the end of the chapter as a Child of Mary should live.

I do not say she got no more help from Father Moberley. Every now and then, prudently, but

not too often, he would take or make some new channel for her energies. How was it that Carrie improved so rapidly in arithmetic? Why were Basil and Lilian so precociously proficient in the Catechism? How was it that the young servant, Mary Jane, said one day to cook, "Lor! the young missus, she do ought to be a nun: she talks just like a hangel, and made me cry that much, I didn't know where I wor!" For in fact Minnie's gentle words and winning sympathies had saved poor Mary Jane from a very dangerous friendship. Father Moberley knew well how and why such effects were wrought. And so things went on with quiet regularity for about eighteen months. Regularity? Yes, all was going on as before: her character seemed to have thoroughly settled down as an assured success. It was no longer necessary to keep up a close watch, and had not been for months. True, her communions were not quite so frequent as at first, sometimes fortnightly, twice even left for a month; but then even that was by no means bad, and who expects first fervour to keep its intensity for ever? Mrs. Fussy might find out that our high-flying saint was beginning to droop her wings, but who cared about Mrs. Fussy's remarks? Tut! Minnie Caldwell was quite safe.

And yet Minnie was on a very slippery path.

She had to figure in many scenes where Father Moberley never saw her. Mr. Caldwell's roof was hospitable, and Minnie had to be chief entertainer. She was clever, you know, and to be queen of a drawing-room is a fascinating position. And sometimes, as she was undressing at night, a mocking echo of some of her flighty words, her thoughtless witticisms, her imperious sarcasms, would flash before her mind, with the empty laughter that had followed them. And conscience would say, "Ha! did a Child of Mary say that?" "Pooh! what harm is there in that? Can't we enjoy ourselves without sin?" And poor conscience had to shrink back into a corner.

Yes, I fear Minnie is going to have another spell of history.

This is how it all came about. It was a Thursday afternoon, and the Altar Society was working away. Minnie was not there, and had not been for three Thursdays back. There was no obligation to go, she said. Tongues were going as fast as needles. I wonder what they were discussing, and why the subject was so suddenly dropped when Father Moberley made his appearance.

"What!" said he, "have I suddenly transformed you into a Quakers' meeting? Why, one would almost think you had been talking scandal."

One or two tell-tale blushes told him yes, but he pretended not to see.

"What a full meeting!" he said glancing round, "everybody here except Miss Caldwell: what has become of her?"

"Oh, *don't* you know," explained Mrs. Fussy, "that the *Archery* Club meets on Thursdays, and that a person *can't* be in two places at the same time?"

"Well, not unless he's a bird, according to Sir Boyle Roche," answered Father Moberley, mentally recording a resolution to see into this; but before he could change the conversation, Mrs. Fussy had added:

"I think it's *another* kind of archery that's attracting *her*."

Here a bright girl, named Celia Roberts, who thought that this allusion to Cupid's arrows had gone far enough, gave Mrs. Fussy a warning prick on the elbow with her needle; but there was no stopping it; she had reserved this little tit-bit specially for Father Moberley, and out it must come.

"Mr. Lascelles seems also to be very fond of archery." This certainly was giving an interesting turn to the conversation, but as far as any verbal answer was concerned it fell flat. So Mrs. Fussy continued:

"I wonder when they *are* to be married."

"Really, Mrs. Fussy," replied Father Moberley. "they must know their own business best : anyway, I don't suppose either of them will consult *you*."

Everybody laughed, and Mrs. Fussy felt small. "Could he have known it before?" she thought, "I made sure I was giving news." It *was* news, though no surprise had been shown,—and not very good news either.

Mr. Lascelles was a nice young fellow, well-connected, tolerably well off, by no means wanting in intelligence, frank in disposition, pleasant in company, and of an even temper. Just the thing for Minnie! my reader says. Well, but—you see there was a *but*—he was an Agnostic in religion, an unbeliever of a most subtle kind.

The next few days' observation made Mrs. Fussy's suspicion look very probable. Father Moberley saw the danger, knowing both of them well, and wondered how far the affair had really gone. "She'll certainly go back again to the world if she marries him. Talking will be of no use, he's so *liberal* in his views,—says he rather prefers the Catholic religion,—in fact, sometimes feels next-door to joining it. She has had no experience of this kind of danger, and will refuse to see it. It's a desperate case,—some frightful surgery wanted here. I only hope

it's not too late : if he has already proposed, it is." Full of these thoughts, Father Moberley made it a matter of special prayer, engaging the prayers of others also, before taking any step. His action was at last determined by a seeming accident. Among his letters one morning came the following :

"The Colonel and Officers of the —th Regiment desire the pleasure of the Rev. W. Moberley's presence at the American Hall, on Wednesday the 15th inst. Dancing at 9."

Being chaplain of the troops, it was of course only natural that he should receive the invitation, but he smiled as he slipped it into his waste-paper basket, saying to himself, "Fancy me dragging Mrs. Fussy through a quadrille." Mrs. Fussy's name started an idea. "Hold on!" he said, taking the card out of the basket again, "Minnie will be there ; Lascelles also. Mrs. Fussy was saying she believed Minnie danced the round dances. I'll go to that ball." So the return post carried Father Moberley's acceptance to the Colonel. The round dances, I may observe, were forbidden by the rules of the Children of Mary.

The ballroom was certainly a beautiful sight that night. The side pillars had been run up with temporary mirrors framed in evergreens, and the

room was lit with bunches of candles, embedded in flowers. No expense had been spared, for the —th was a wealthy regiment ; and certainly taste was not wanting. Nor was taste wanting in the ladies' dresses, so that the whole scene was brilliant beyond my powers of description. Father Moberley entered purposely a little late, about ten o'clock. A dance was just finishing, a schottische, and he was just in time to see Minnie being led to her seat. She was splendidly dressed, more in accordance with fashion than with decorum, for her dress was low. "She does dance these things then, does she?" But Minnie did not see him. He soon found his way to the Colonel, who was standing disengaged.

"Well, Father Moberley, glad to see you. You don't do the light fantastic?"

"No, my profession places me among the old fogies, you know."

"Prematurely," said the Colonel, with a courtly bow. Thus a minute or two passed in chat, and Father Moberley was able to move off. As he turned he caught sight of a group,—Minnie and some other girl entertaining three or four young men, Lascelles among the number. The conversation was very animated, and Minnie was taking the lion's share in it, to judge by the way they all

turned towards her and laughed. Father Moberley walked round the room, so that he might suddenly come upon the group, face to face with Minnie. On his way he passed Celia Roberts.

"You here, Father Moberley!"

"Yes, Miss Roberts. I may look after my sheep anywhere you know. And, to begin with, let me congratulate you."

"Me! Father. Why?"

"In the first place because I see you are not dancing the round dances, otherwise you would have been in that schottische; and in the second place, of all under thirty years of age, you are the only one in the room decently dressed."

Celia had on a pretty white dress, trimmed with simple white swansdown round the neck, round the sleeves, and down the front.

"Well, I never wear my dresses low, Father."

"I don't see how you could, being a Child of Mary;" and he passed on.

"My word!" thought Celia, "Minnie will catch it."

A slight turn brought Father Moberley to the group. Minnie was in the middle of an anecdote. What it was he could not hear, but her ringing laugh of mockery told it was at someone else's expense. She had laid her fan on her interlocutor's

arm to give due impressiveness to her story, when she suddenly caught Father Moberley's eye. To her it was like seeing a ghost, or rather it was as if her own conscience were to leave her and walk past her in bodily form as a stranger. The words died on her lips, but she had the presence of mind to bow. He looked her straight in the face coldly and calmly, and passed without a sign of recognition. Minnie turned pale, then red, then pale again, and could not finish her story. Cut dead ! it was too bad : anything else she could have borne. All her cold, hard pride came back ; only that could keep back her tears ; and she began to feel desperate. Of course this was noticed by the rest of the group. One of them winked at his neighbour and was just going to remark on it, when he was checked by a gentlemanly frown, and just then the premonitory thrum from the band dispersed them to prepare for the next dance. Lascelles only remained, and seeing Minnie still looking distressed, he said :

"Is it anything I can help you in, Miss Caldwell ?"

"No, thank you ; except—yes, pardon me, I have promised you this waltz, will you let me off, please ?"

"Certainly. I am sorry you have been hurt : I have no right to seek the cause."

"I would much rather you didn't."

So he led her to where her mother was sitting. Father Moberley soon came up to shake hands with Mrs. Caldwell, and Minnie moved away. But there was no escape. He made his excuse to Mrs. Caldwell, saying her daughter wanted a talking to.

"Miss Caldwell," he said behind her, as she stood gazing on the darkness outside. She turned round angrily in her old way, and said, "You cut me dead."

"How could I recognise a Child of Mary dancing forbidden dances, flirting, and—dressed like that?"

Quickly as he had said this, Minnie had already instinctively drawn her cloud over her shoulders, and now blushed scarlet. Already in her own room before the glass, conscience had whispered, "How would Our Lady like that?" And Minnie had answered, "Nonsense, it's the fashion; people will think no more of my shoulders than they do of my hands." And so conscience had been sent back further into the old corner. But here was Father Moberley calling it out again, and its voice now was unpleasantly loud.

"Why did you come here, Father?" she returned, hardly knowing what she was saying: "I thought you never came to balls."

"I came here on purpose to give you this rebuke,

and to warn you that you are slipping back into idolatry."

"Into idolatry ! What do you mean, Father ?"

"By idolatry, I mean worshipping Astarte, bowing down before Baal, and sacrificing one's children to Moloch." And with these words he was gone. He threaded his way through the dancers, hardly heeding the scene, till he reached the door ; when he gave one glance back, thinking, "Well, thank God, I have no part or lot in this : under other circumstances, it might have been an intense fascination to me." In that one glance he was horrified to see Minnie, whirling round with Mr. Lascelles in the dance from which she had asked to be excused. She had been so stung, that wild impulses were rushing through her brain, and seeing Mr. Lascelles near she joined in the dance at once, simply as a distraction. Father Moberley looked upon it as a defiance, and as a deliberate choice of evil rather than good. "It was the last chance," he sighed, "and it has failed. God only knows what will become of that girl."


Before the next dance was over, Father Moberley was on his knees in his own room. I wonder what Minnie would have said, had she seen him, strong man as he was, weeping like a child for the beautiful soul slipping from his grasp. "Oh, my God,"

was his prayer, "wherein have I been unfaithful that I should lose this soul? Let me bear the punishment of it, rather than her."

Ah, Father Moberley, the grace of God has ways of working that even you do not always see.

CHAPTER VI.

And recovery.

E left Minnie waltzing and trying to banish disagreeable thoughts by unusually brilliant conversation. But the thoughts would not be banished. The night wore on, and Minnie went on dancing and talking as she had never done before. Her face was flushed, and her heart within was in a whirl of excitement. It was impossible to analyse her state of mind. All one could say was that it would probably end in some wild impulse or other.

An indication of this was given a little later on, when she was dancing with that obtuse young gentleman, who had so inopportunately winked at his neighbour. Deceived by the light way she was rattling on, and thinking her to be a thoroughly worldly girl, and knowing that she had been made angry by Father Moberley, he fancied that he should get further into her good graces by having a "shot" at that reverend gentleman.

"By the way," he said, "where's the parson? I don't see him."

"Whom do you mean?"

"I mean that sanctimonious party who cut you dead, and then slunk out before he had been ten minutes in the room."

Minnie was silent from pure indignation. The blundering youth took this for encouragement, and went on:

"That's the worst of these people. They're too mean-spirited and haven't got the gumption to enjoy life; and then stand apart and roll up their eyes, and condemn us as publicans and sinners."

"Silence, Sir!" broke in Minnie, with flashing eyes, and stung by passion into an extremity of exaggeration; "for you to raise your voice against that man is sheer blasphemy. He's not a parson, he's a priest. He rejects the world because he is above it. He has talent enough to outshine all the men in this room, and goodness enough to make them all blush for shame, and strength enough to horsewhip you, if need were. You need not trouble to take me to my seat, and you need never ask me to dance with you again."

So saying, she swept off alone, leaving him to feel like the booby that he was.

"Upon my word, Minnie," said Mrs. Caldwell,

looking anxiously at her, "you are very extraordinary this evening. What have you done with your partner?"

"I have cut him adrift, Mother, dear: he was rude. Trust me, won't you?" and she kissed her mother, not caring who was looking on.

Her blundering partner had done her more good than either of them knew. He had revealed to her that she was not really angry with Father Moberley, as she had fancied she was, but with herself. In fact, this wild defiance of hers was but the last kick of her dying pride, and the end of it was not far off. In the few minutes which this episode had left her, she turned over in her mind Father Moberley's last mysterious words. What could they mean? "Bowling down to Baal,"—that was evidently worldliness. But "sacrificing one's children to Moloch," what a queer thing to say! And then "worshipping Astarte,"—who *was* Astarte?

A few minutes afterwards, in another dance, she said to her partner:

"Mr. Lascelles, are you learned in mythology?"

"Well, not very; but I think I know the difference between Jupiter and Apollo."

"Then do you know who Astarte was?"

Mr. Lascelles looked at her with a searching

glance. Was she poking fun at him? or had she a deeper meaning? or was she quite innocent? Evidently the last, so he simply answered :

"I believe she was the Phœnician Goddess of Love. Why do you ask?"

Poor Minnie's embarrassment was extreme. She saw at once the full purpose of Father Moberley's words. He had been warning her against worldliness and misplaced love,—in fact, against this very Mr. Lascelles. At the same moment she saw the meaning of her partner's searching glance, and for once Minnie Caldwell had not a word to say for herself. Still, her ingenuity did not desert her, for I suppose it was not by accident that at this juncture she put her foot upon her dress in such a way that it was necessary to draw aside, and temporarily repair the rent. Under cover of this stratagem, which Mr. Lascelles pretended not to see through, she was able to think of some nonsense or other about this Goddess of Love, which did not indeed deceive her partner, but convinced him at least that she had had no hidden meaning in her question.

This incident was remarked by two interested observers who were not dancing, Minnie's brother Alfred, and Celia Roberts.

"Look at your sister," said Celia, "she's quite excited to-night. Can't you stop her?"

"Stop Minnie! Why, I might as well try to stop the Great Northern express."

"Yes, but she'll get into dreadful trouble with Father Moberley."

"Can't help it : the mischief's done now. Besides, if I were to suggest going home now, it would make her stop an hour longer on purpose."

"That's all you men know of woman's character."

"It isn't by any means all I know of Minnie's character, anyhow," said Alfred, not offering to move.

"At least, if she won't go for you, I think she would go if she looked and saw how tired your mother is."

"By Jove, you're right! Minnie is not ungenerous. She'll snub me, I know, but she'll go if I tell her that."

So just as the rent was pinned up, Alfred arrived and said, "Minnie, you must be tired, eh? it's long after midnight."

"Oh, I can take care of myself; you go and look after Celia."

"Nonsense, you don't feel how tired you are. Why you've been dancing these last two hours like Old Harry himself."

"Old Harry! does he dance?"

"Well, Father Henneberry says it is his favourite occupation."

"But what are you in such a hurry for, Alf? Has Celia been unkind to you?"

"Oh, you leave Celia alone."

"All right, I'll leave her alone, if you promise to do the same,—there!"

"No, that's not a fair bargain," laughed Alfred; "but, seriously, Minnie, Celia had something to do with my coming, and if I were you, I would not leave it to strangers to discover how tired mother is looking."

"That's true," said Minnie, after a glance towards her mother, and a rapid reflection that all her thoughtlessness and selfishness were coming back. "You'll excuse me then, Mr. Lascelles? I'm only engaged for one dance more, and that's the Lancers with funny old Major Wheezy. If you see him, you'll tell him I had to go,—good-bye."

"Shall I not see you downstairs?"

"Oh, thank you, no; Celia is not going with us, so Alfred will have one arm and eye to spare for me, otherwise——"

She had to break off, for Alfred was threatening to close her mouth for her.

In the carriage, the talking was all done by Mrs. Caldwell and Alfred. At one time the latter happened to say,

"How jollily Celia was dressed, wasn't she?"

Mrs. Caldwell ventured to add,

"Yes, and by the way, Minnie, when Father Moberley came in, I was wishing you had been dressed like her."

"So was I, Mother."

It was Minnie's only remark ; and when they reached home, she went straight up to her room, and with all her ball-dress finery on threw herself at the feet of her crucifix. Here the long pent-up emotion had full play. For some hours she had been acting a part ; now she was all reality. I will not venture to say what were her thoughts or prayers ; but after a while she arose calmly, took off her beautiful dress, turned it round once or twice, and deliberately tore it to shreds. Then, surveying the ruin, she said, "I have made many resolutions before now ; this one, by the grace of God, is final."

CHAPTER VII.

Open confession is good for the soul.



THE ball had taken place on Wednesday. The next day was the meeting of the Altar Society, and a nice little scandal Mrs. Fussy thought they should be treated to. She had heard the whole story (not from Celia, though), and had heard it with embellishments. She determined that others should hear it too, and we may be sure it would lose nothing in her hands. The spiritual reading, however, with which the meeting always began, was still going on, when, amid general surprise, Minnie herself walked in,—“as brazen as brazen could be,” was Mrs. Fussy’s unuttered comment. To Celia, Minnie’s entrance was a great relief ; but for it, she would have been questioned a great deal more than she cared for. Work went on in comparative quiet. Most of the members had heard vaguely that Minnie was somehow or other in disgrace, and the subject of the ball which was uppermost in their thoughts, was care-

fully avoided. Even those who knew nothing felt there was something awkward, and tried to dispel it by cheerful conversation. Everything however fell flat, until one of them at last in perfect innocence said :

"Well, we're hearing nothing about this grand ball last night. Was nobody there?"

"Oh yes, Miss Mooney," was the answer, my readers know whose, "the Children of Mary were *well* represented there."

Minnie here raised her eyes, and looked the speaker through and through. Mrs. Fussy decided that she looked dangerous, so toned down at once. Still she had begun, and the opening was irresistible.

"Look at Miss Roberts now," she went on (poor Celia, not accustomed to dissipation, wore a rather faded look); "she doesn't look as if she was in bed before three this morning, does she?"

"No, and I don't feel like it either," added Celia : "I wish I could have gone to bed early."

"Of course, that's always the way : and I suppose you didn't enjoy the dancing either, eh?"

"Well, candidly I did not : I don't see the fun of dancing to those who are not in it, and being a Child of Mary I had to be out of it."

"Oh, *that* need not have prevented you. There

are some who manage to combine the two. In *my* time the Sodality was different. *Now* Children of Mary can dance, *and* flirt, *and* carry on, *and* defy the priests,—bless my soul, Miss Roberts, you are a great deal too strict with yourself.”

“Yes, Mrs. Fussy,” put in Minnie, with a slight ring in her voice that made every one look at her, “Miss Roberts *is* a great deal too strict with herself. She does not realise her privileges. If she would only follow the right models, those saintly Children of Mary who have survived from your time, she would know that she might gossip, *and* slander, *and* lie, like any heathen ; she would know that when she hadn’t courage to say a thing straight out, she would be most like the Blessed Virgin if she made a mean insinuation of it. You, Mrs. Fussy,” and here she dropped all sarcasm, “have been for a long time doing your best to make this meeting of the Children of Mary a hot-bed of detraction and uncharitableness. I have been wrong, I know ; I have danced, and carried on, as you express it, in a way unbecoming any Child of Mary ; and in the right time and place I may disappoint you yet by making due reparation. But at any rate, when I did wrong, I went away to do it. I did not import my bad behaviour into the very heart of the Sodality, as you have done.” Then

lowering her voice, she went on, "I did not come here to-day to speak to you : I meant to be silent until Father Moberley should come. But you have spoken at me, and therefore I challenge your right to sit in judgment over me. I appeal from you to the priest whom you falsely said I defied."

As she said these words, the door opened, and Father Moberley himself entered. When he saw who was speaking, and what the effects of her words were on the faces of the others, he turned to her with a look of angry inquiry. Never had they seen him look so displeased before. Minnie laid down her work, advanced a few paces, and said with one hand on the table (there was something in the hand): "I was waiting for you to come, Father Moberley ; I have something to say to you. I meant to have waited in silence, but remarks were passed which made that silence intolerable, and I had to speak. Will you allow me to say what I want to say?"

"If you mean to speak in a spirit of humility you may ; if not, I will not hear five words from you."

Minnie shrank a little at his sternness, but replied :

"I will leave you to judge, Father. I came here to acknowledge before all these, that for some time

back I have not been living as a Child of Mary ought to live. I have publicly broken all the special rules of the Sodality, and have given scandal by my conduct. Therefore I am not worthy to be a Child of Mary any longer. I have forfeited my right to this medal," here she opened her hand, disclosed the blue ribbon and medal, and left them on the table ; "and I do not wish to receive it back until I can take it once more from your hands. I beg pardon of you, Father, for what must have seemed to you an affront last night ; though perhaps if you saw into my heart, you would judge me more lightly. And I beg pardon also of the Sodality for what I have done."

Father Moberley was calculating how much it must have cost this proud girl to say these words, and when she ceased, he said after a short silence :

"Miss Caldwell, undoubtedly had you not said what you have, you should have been immediately expelled from the Sodality. Your self-judgment is severe, but just. Now that you have pleaded for pardon, if I obeyed the impulse of the moment, I should forgive you freely. But I do not wish to act on impulse. You had better leave us now. I will take your medal, and shall consider when, if at all, to let you have it again. You may come and see me just before the meeting next Sunday, and I will

then tell you my decision, if you are ready to submit to it."

Do not think him hard. He felt that a little humiliation would be necessary for her. And Minnie felt that he felt so, and bore it well. Before she left the room, she stopped before Mrs. Fussy and said : " I spoke hotly just now ; I was nervous and excited ; please try and forget it."

Fortunately Mrs. Fussy could not forget it, and many a scandalous speech was thereafter checked by the silent memory of Minnie's indignant outburst. Immediately on the departure of the latter, Father Moberley broke up the meeting, not wishing that the incident should be too much talked about.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Decision.



ON Friday evening at dessert, when the servants had left the room, Mr. Caldwell said:

"Minnie, who do you think was talking to me about you to-day?"

The Caldwells were very open, and had no secrets from one another.

"I really don't know, Papa; who?"

"Mr. Lascelles."

Minnie coloured and Alfred remarked,

"Ah, I thought he would pop before long."

"Well, Papa," said the person most interested, "and what did you say?"

"Why, I told him, and your mother agrees with me, that if he persuades you, he will have no difficulty in persuading us."

"Yes, Minnie," said her mother, "if you like him, I think he is a good match. He is able to make you comfortable. It's true he is not a Catholic; but then he is not wild, and is ready to make all the concessions the Church demands."

"Yes," said Alfred, "and he has a jolly place down at Freshwater: fine boating and fishing. You'll ask me down there some vac., eh Minnie?"

"But suppose I don't go there?"

"Nonsense! you can't marry a man and never go to his country house,—absurd!"

"But suppose I don't marry him?"

"Not marry Lascelles! Don't talk like a fool, Minnie."

"I don't quite see the folly. You would hardly expect me to marry a man just to give you an occasional week's fishing and boating, would you?"

"No, but seriously, Minnie," interrupted Mr. Caldwell, "what will you say?"

"I will see him, Papa, when he calls; you can leave the answer to me?"

"Entirely. If you say yes, we shall be pleased; if you say no, well, we won't break our hearts over it."

"I don't know about that," put in Alfred, "I might."

"Oh," said Minnie, laughing, "you had better keep your heart whole for Celia. You'll want it all, to give you courage to *pop*, yourself, as you call it."

When Mr. Lascelles called next day, Alfred brought Minnie the tidings thus,—“There he is, Min., now go down and don't make a stupid of yourself.” To which she vouchsafed no answer.

Of the two, Mr. Lascelles showed much the greater nervousness. Minnie had a way of bracing herself up for an effort, and not giving way till afterwards. She had not the slightest tinge of affectation, so could not get herself to pretend that this was only an ordinary call. Thus it was that she did not shake hands with him, but bowed from some distance off, and looked inquiringly for him to begin. This dignified behaviour threw him somewhat out of his reckoning, and the grand little speech with which he had determined to commence vanished entirely. It is strange how even the most self-possessed young men make fools of themselves on these occasions.

"Miss Caldwell, I—er—, I—er—," he began ; but, not seeing exactly how to proceed on that line, he ventured on the startling observation, "Fine morning, isn't it?"

"It is a remarkably fine morning, Mr. Lascelles."

The calm collected tones of her voice put him once more at his ease, and he soon came to the object of his visit. He pleaded his cause in words which would not look eloquent if I wrote them down, but which, as they proceeded warm from his young, honest, loving heart, possessed an eloquence above that of mere form, and Minnie began to tremble for her resolution. She liked him intensely,

and could easily have brought herself to love him strongly, and in forming her determination to answer no, had intended to cut only her own heart-strings. Strange to say, she had hardly thought of having to hurt him as well as herself, and now she found that what she had half overlooked was the more difficult task of the two. So feeling that the sooner the decisive word was said the better, she took advantage of his first pause, and said :

“ Mr. Lascelles, I cannot pretend to be indifferent to what you say ; I cannot even pretend to have been unaware that this declaration was coming. Considering the answer I have to give, I ought to have prevented it. If I had consulted my conscience rather than my inclination, it should have been prevented. Now, owing to my culpable thoughtlessness, I have given needless pain to you as well as to myself.”

“ Don't blame yourself, please, Miss Caldwell,” said Mr. Lascelles, though with an effort ; “ even if you refuse me, I can accuse you of nothing unmaidenly. You are free as the air. No word or deed of yours has ever given me any claim over you. I only plead.”

“ Indeed, Mr. Lascelles, you are generous, too generous. I do not acquit myself so lightly ; and therefore before I say no, I will say this, that in so

far as I may have given you more reason than other girls to think or expect that I would say yes, I beg you to forgive me. It was foolish and wrong, for I cannot say yes,—I must say no.”

“But why must you say no? What is between us?”

Minnie thought of the words, “between us there is a great gulf fixed,” but dared not say them. She only replied,

“Oh, don’t ask me my reason, I beg of you.”


“Pardon me, Miss Caldwell, I do not think it unreasonable to ask. Your manner, even more than your words, give me the *right* to ask.”

“Well, if you will ask, all I can say is this,—that it is because I do not want to worship Astarte, I do not want to bow down before Baal, and I do not want to sacrifice my children to Moloch. I cannot trust myself to say one word more. I must make to you the answer that I made before my God, and that answer is No.”

So saying she bade him farewell. Father Moberley’s words had burnt into her, and when pressed for her reason, she had quoted them by a sudden impulse, leaving Mr. Lascelles to find out their meaning, just as Father Moberley had left her to do before.

CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Lascelles hears the reason why.

 R. LASCELLES was for a while mentally stunned by Minnie's refusal, but his habitual gentlemanly tact stood him in good stead. He felt instinctively that she had spoken from no ordinary emotion and from the very depths of sincerity. He felt that he could not, at least now, get her to unsay what she had said, without making her unfaithful to her highest moral convictions ; that he could not even make the attempt without cruelty. And as it was her he loved and not himself, he would neither tempt her nor pain her. So he let her depart without a word.

But when she had gone, he began to reflect ; what had changed her ? A week ago she would have consented to have become his wife. Even now she loved him, and had only refused him for a reason,—well, it was a reason of conscience evidently from her earnestness,—but how queerly she put

it! "Didn't want to worship Astarte! By Jove! that's the very thing she asked me about at the ball, and got so confused over it. Oho! I have it now. It's that Father Moberley. He came to that ball for the very purpose of standing between us. It was he that used those words to her, and the innocent girl did not even see what he was driving at. I call that mean."

Mr. Lascelles knew well that mixed marriages were objected to by the Catholic Church; but the objection had been got over in the case of several of his acquaintances, so he had had no misgivings on that score. Father Moberley's action therefore seemed to him an unwarrantable interference, and with his usual straightforwardness he went direct from the Caldwell's to the Presbytery.

"Father Moberley," he said, "I have reason to think that you have been doing me a great injustice."

"Indeed, Mr. Lascelles! I am sorry to hear it. It must have been unconsciously. May I ask what it is?"

"You have been interfering between me and Miss Caldwell."

"And supposing for a moment that I have, are you sure it was an injustice, Mr. Lascelles?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, are you sure that you have so great a right to marry a Catholic, that the Church has nothing at all to say on the matter?"

"No, that is not my attitude. I grant you full control in Church matters, and the right of giving counsel in other matters; but when you go beyond that, it seems to me to be going too far."

"Then perhaps you think that marriage is not a Church matter? Or perhaps you will allow me to give counsel, but will not allow anybody to take it? That is, it is not unjust to give advice, but when anybody follows my advice, then I am committing an injustice! Or perhaps you think that a Catholic priest is like that respectable institution, the parson, who is always giving good advice, amid a general tacit understanding that nobody need mind him, because it's his business to talk like that. But in reality, Mr. Lascelles, I think you overrate my influence in this matter."

"I think not, Father Moberley. Can you deny that you came to the ball the other evening on purpose to speak to Miss Caldwell? Can you deny that what you came to say had reference to me? Is it surprising, then, that on her refusing me to-day, though three days ago she would have accepted me, I attribute this change to you?"

"Oh! then she *has* refused you? *Deo gratias!*

Pardon me ; I am sorry for you, Mr. Lascelles, but I think she has done the right thing, and I hardly expected she would have the strength of character, nay, the grace to do it. I have no desire to deny anything ; but it is right to tell you, that about you Miss Caldwell has never said to me one word, and I have said to her only one, and that not directly, but merely allegorically as a general warning against worldliness and mixed marriages, without even mentioning your name. If she has refused you, it is because face to face with her own conscience, she has determined it to be her duty (if she marries at all) to marry in her own Church. I am truly sorry for you, because I think she does care for you, and you would have been happy together, if it were not that there is something higher than earthly happiness. And, indeed, I should not have opposed the matter further, if she had wished to go on with it. But since she has chosen, for the sake of faith and virtue, to go counter to natural affection, I should not be a Catholic priest if I did not applaud her decision. I will only say that I am sure the greatest part of her sacrifice was not her own loss, but the pain she had to inflict on you. I am much mistaken in your character, Mr. Lascelles, if after reflection you refuse to admire her or continue to blame me."

"Certainly, Father Moberley," replied Mr. Las-

celles, holding out his hand, "I believe every word you say about your own part in this, and deeply as I differ from you, I see that you were within your right. I retract anything I may have said in my warmth. But it is hard lines that when one person makes a sacrifice, the brunt of it should fall upon less heroic people, who have to bear all the pain without the sense of moral compensation."

"Yes, it is hard," replied the priest, "but it is the law of human destinies ; hardly a family but feels it one way or another. But as for you, Mr. Lascelles, when this shock has passed away, you will be none the worse for it. You will easily find a partner more suited to your sphere of life. Miss Caldwell will make you a good friend ; as a wife, her conduct, if faithful to her own sense of duty, would have proved a restraint upon you ; and if unfaithful,—would you wish to make her unfaithful ? would you wish to blunt her moral sensibilities, and drag her life to a lower level ?"


"God forbid,—if there be a God," answered Mr. Lascelles.

"Then think over this ; and I hope, in spite of all, you will still keep me also on your list of friends."

They then shook hands, and Mr. Lascelles departed a sadder and a wiser man.

CHAPTER X.

The AMENDE HONORABLE.

R. LASCELLES' interview with Father Moberley had taken place on Saturday, and of course Minnie knew nothing about it. Her interview was to come off on Sunday. Poor girl! she did not relish the thought of it. In the first moments of reaction, penance had seemed easy, but now she was exhausted by the many and various emotions of the last few days and had hardly strength enough to face a new humiliation. In truth she had half thought, though she silenced the thought, that Father Moberley would accept her first apology with free forgiveness, that he would act upon the impulse she knew he would feel. Everyone knows the sinking of heart experienced when, to the words "I beg pardon," it is severely but justly replied "You do well to beg pardon;" there can be no surer test of sincerity of sorrow. But besides this, Minnie felt that in giving up Mr. Lascelles the real sacrifice had

already been made, the great punishment had already fallen ; and it would not be known, and could not be taken account of, and therefore she should have to bear everything just as if she had done nothing. It was bitter, but her sense of justice and her sterling sincerity carried her through ; and though she felt as if she were going to the surgeons to have an open wound probed, yet she did go.

If Minnie felt like a surgeon's patient, Father Moberley certainly felt like the surgeon himself ; for his reflection as she entered was, "My last operation in this case, I hope." After what he had heard from Mr. Lascelles, he was quite sure of her now.

"Well, Miss Caldwell," he said, smiling, "so you've come to receive your sentence, eh ? Are you ready to submit to it ?"

"So it be not beyond my strength, Father, I am."

"Then let me tell you in the first place, that if this were only between you and me, I should impose no penalty whatever. It has come to my knowledge that you have done even more than is necessary to prove your entire repentance. When I tell you that Mr. Lascelles called on me yesterday, you will know what I mean."

"Oh, then you know it, Father ; I am so glad : did I do right ?"

"I think you did, my child ; for I think that you *could* not have done it without the impulse of the highest possible motives ; and such things done with such motives have a hundred-fold reward, Our Lord says. I hope you will never live to regret it. But then the Children of Mary don't know this. You could hardly proclaim it to them, could you ? And yet your reparation must be open before them all."

"Oh I will do anything you wish, Father. I felt lonely in my sacrifice,—you have read my heart, Father, and you know it *was* a sacrifice,—but now that you know of it, I am sure of sympathy, and will do what is wanted of me."

"Very well then, Minnie, my decision is that you are to choose your own punishment : so can I best show my confidence in you. I only make one condition, and that is that the punishment be undergone at an early meeting of the Sodality."

Minnie thought for a while, and at last said :

"Then, Father, I choose this,—I will kneel in the midst and read an act of sorrow and apology, and they shall say the little office for my amendment, and I shall go back to the grade of Aspirant for three months. Will that do ?"

It was severe, but Father Moberley thought it would be better for herself that it should be accepted. The act was soon drawn up, and Minnie entered the Sodality Chapel for the ordeal. All were assembled. Father Moberley said a few well-chosen words, which should temper the severity of the rebuke for Minnie, and yet not lessen the emphasis of it for the others. Minnie knelt and with trembling voice began :

“ I, Minnie Caldwell, heretofore a Child of Mary, prostrate at Our Lady’s feet, in the presence of the whole Sodality, declare myself to have been guilty of the following faults——.”

Hardly had she got so far, when with a sudden movement Celia was on her knees by Minnie’s side, and clasping Minnie’s hand in her own broke out : “ And I, Celia Roberts, make public declaration that I am every bit as bad.” None but was moved by this act of generosity ; indeed it threatened to be contagious, but for Father Moberley’s grave rebuke.

“ Rise, Miss Roberts, this is not a question of affection but of justice ; the innocent must not be confounded with the guilty. Let Miss Caldwell do her penance alone.”

* * * * *

Thus has our heroine, through the Valley of Humiliation, got back into the right path again. I might go on with many more chapters telling of her after-history; for the course of her life, like that of true love, never did run smooth. To the end of her days she remained the same Minnie,—strong impulses leading her from time to time beyond the bounds of discretion, and stronger impulses leading her back again to an even higher level than before.

Mr. Lascelles did *not* die prematurely of grief, but married a more congenial spirit about a year afterwards. He loved his wife well, but never thought he was unfaithful to her in cherishing a sense of the great, irreparable loss he had sustained in the vanishing from him of his ideal of womanhood, Minnie Caldwell.

“But what became of Minnie herself?” Oh, she went to Heaven, I hope. “Yes, yes, but whom did she marry and all that,—or did she become a nun?” Oh, is that what you mean? I thought you meant the more important question. Well, there was nothing very romantic about the rest of her life,—in fact, you will be dreadfully disappointed about it; you had better let me leave it as it is. Still, you want to know all the same? Then here it is. Leaving society to care for itself, she devoted herself

to household work and reading, took her mother's place in the family, was much beloved by the younger ones, idolised by Alfred in spite of the loss of his boating and fishing, and blessed by the poor who lived round about.

She fancied once that she had a vocation, and Sister Mary Germaine supported her warmly,—on the ground that, if she had got through *all that* safely, she could get through anything, and would make a splendid nun. Father Moberley, however, gave a decided negative; nor would he give any other reason than this,—that Minnie was a comet, not a planet, and therefore she must have her own orbit. Somebody suggested to him that if she got married she would have to follow her husband's orbit. Father Moberley merely smiled and said that his study of human as well as celestial astronomy had taught him that orbits were matters of gravitation; the weightiest characters swung the others round,—and it would have to be a very weighty man indeed who could control Minnie's orbit. "Then you mean that she would control his?" "It might come to that," said Father Moberley, "and it might be the best thing in the world for him."

And so in fact it came to pass. To make a long story short, Mr. Field, a Catholic gentleman of the

neighbourhood, paid his addresses, proposed, and was accepted,—was it in resignation, or was it in love? And on one and the same day, Celia Roberts became Celia Caldwell, and Minnie Caldwell became Minnie Field.

The rest of her life was not the perfection of earthly happiness. Mr. Field was a good man, a thorough gentleman, and loved her more and more every day ; and she returned his love : but he was nothing very striking any way,—and he had a temper. (You see, you would have me to tell it all.) And so Minnie lived on. There lurked far away in the back recesses of her heart an unexpelled regret that Mr. Lascelles had not been a Catholic, but she never allowed it to appear on the surface, not even when Mr. Field was in a temper. Her strength of character told, as Father Moberley had predicted. She did her spiriting gently, indeed, but it was unmistakably she who ruled the house. She ruled it well, kept Mr. Field well up to his duties, and proved herself a model of a Catholic mother.

Several years afterwards, Father Moberley was visiting the Fields' one day, and Minnie sat with one little golden-haired maiden on her lap and two sturdy urchins playing around. Suddenly Father Moberley drew out his pocket-book, and taking

from it a piece of faded peacock-blue material, handed it to her and said, "Do you remember that?" She did not for a moment. He resumed, "It is a trophy. Do you remember my telling you that your life was no better than a loafer's?"

"Indeed I do, and how I cried over it."

"Well, it is something for your children at any rate to laugh over."

"Ay, to laugh, and to thank God for,—for otherwise they would have been sacrificed to Moloch."

MINNIE'S DAUGHTER.

MINNIE'S DAUGHTER.

A SEQUEL.

CHAPTER I.

Edith's Childhood.



HEAR that some people were disappointed over Minnie Caldwell. I don't know exactly what they expected, but they seem to find her destiny too commonplace. Some, I suppose, would have had her forget the disappointment of her life by seeking the lofty consolations of the cloister. Others, perhaps, wanted Mr. Lascelles to be converted just in the nick of time,—hurried explanations,—magnanimous renunciation,—and all that sort of thing. Or others again expected that Minnie, purified by sorrow and trial, was to be led on to high flights of solitary and mystic sanctity. But nobody wanted her to behave like an ordinary woman, or the world

to go on in its ordinary way. Poor Minnie, at first she was accused of being an impossible girl, and then she is snuffed out for being too commonplace. However, she had to go on her own way, and so had this world of ours. Romance is all very well in books and in young girls' visions ; but for the good ordering of life, give me common sense. Here is the position : Minnie could not marry Mr. Lascelles, so she let him alone ; yet she saw that her vocation was for the married state, so she married someone else. What more do we want ?

Be that as it may, henceforward she is to us no longer Minnie, but plain Mrs. Field. The life she chose may be disappointing to lovers of the marvellous, but it was the way that God wished her to walk ; and anyone who realises all the virtue that goes to make a model Catholic mother, as we heard that she became, would be slow to call her career commonplace. At any rate she had plenty to do with looking after the golden-haired little maiden and the two bonny boys whom God had entrusted to her.

Edith, whose career we are now going to follow, was a bright lively child in her earlier years. Her capacity for mischief was something wonderful, and was fully developed as soon as she could get about.

The activity of her little legs defied the strictest vigilance, and again and again an unnatural stillness would suggest the suspicion that the little mind was absorbed in some mischief or other, and no sooner would one start to prevent it when the merry little laugh and pattering feet told that it was too late. She was hardly four years old when she could read, and read so nicely that it was a treat to hear her keeping school with her dolls.

Strangers often asked why she played so much alone,—why not play with her brothers Arthur and George? But there was no getting a reason for the little maiden's whims ; she willed it so, and so it was. It was not that the boys were too rough, or were unkind to her,—Mrs. Field would have prevented that, you may be sure : on the contrary, they felt hurt at her abstention. Her mother was at first amused, and thought it was only infantile coquetry, but it lasted too long ; and besides, one began to observe in the child a growing dislike to any display of affection. If Arthur or George kissed her more than once, they got their ears boxed ; her mother's kisses she tolerated, and her father was a privileged person, but strangers had to beware. If anyone stole a kiss from her, she would ostentatiously rub it off again with her sleeve, and would never be friendly again. Such was our little

friend Edith, and Mrs. Field soon recognised that she had not an ordinary character to deal with. This reserve, so early displayed, might be a good sign, or it might not. All the more need of prayer.

Edith had one little friend, Julia Lascelles, who used sometimes to come and spend the day with her. Julia was almost eighteen months older, but Edith was more precocious and always took the lead. Julia was Mr. Lascelles' only child: her mother had died at her birth, so what with nurses and her indulgent father we may imagine she was pretty well spoiled. Mrs. Field she simply adored, and used to long for the time when she might go and spend the day with Edith. Mr. Lascelles found this out,—and was not sorry. He knew *why* Mrs. Field bore from this child what she would not have put up with in any other,—waywardness and caprice. Some things are silent as the grave, yet speak louder than words.

One day Mr. Lascelles, taking little Julia's face between his hands, said to her, "Looloo, would you like to go and be Edith's sister?" The little leap of joy told him truly, and it was only the second thought which added, "but I won't go away from you, Papa." He said nothing: he had reasons for thinking that the going away would be on his side, and was making up his mind as to what to do with

her. His thoughts always returned to this: "I would rather have her trained by Minnie than by anybody else in the wide world,—if only she would do it. I wonder if she would." Would she?

CHAPTER II.

Edith's Parents.



R. LASCELLES' forebodings were caused by the premonitory symptoms of an illness which he knew would be his last. Instead of endeavouring to persuade himself that it would pass away, as people with consumption so often do, he faced the matter frankly, got the candid opinion of an able medical man, and began setting his affairs in order. He was wise to do so, for the disease came on with rapid strides, and almost before people had had time to notice that he was beginning to look bad, he was suddenly struck down, and had to stay in bed merely waiting for death. I say he was wise, for all his affairs having been first put in order, his mind was not troubled with business anxieties, and was consequently free to face the great problem of the hereafter which it is impossible for any thinking man to shirk. It *was* a problem to him, for we have already seen that he was an Agnostic, one whose religion consisted of the one dogma that

we know nothing and can know nothing of the other world. But when it came to his turn to *go* to the other world, the question pressed itself more and more upon him,—was it really so uncertain? He had all along thought that if there were a real religion on earth it was the Catholic, and he now began to think,—what if the Catholics were right after all? What if Minnie were right? What if he had not only lost her, but were losing his own soul also by his infidelity? Then Julia? Hitherto she had been taught no religion. He had meant her to choose for herself when she grew up; but it struck him now how foolish this was. In training her without religion he was already choosing for her; and what right had he to choose?

Here were two reasons why he should want to see Mrs. Field. He did not care to see a priest,—a woman's keen instinct, he said, would help him more than all the head-work of theologians. That was what he said; but by "a woman's instinct" I think that he meant one particular woman's instinct and no one else's. Be it so; it may not have been rational, it was natural. Minnie had gone through a terrible sacrifice before receiving this homage of distant adoration of which she was wholly unconscious,—it was part of her reward. A strong effort to do right *now* under difficult circumstances

may gain for us in some distant future an almost exaggerated influence for good over the hearts of others.

At any rate, Mrs. Field was surprised one morning at breakfast to find a letter on her plate marked with the Lascelles' arms. From the way she put it down after reading it, Mr. Field saw that she did not wish to speak of it before the children ; but after breakfast when they were alone, she handed him the letter saying :

" It is from Mr. Lascelles, Arthur ; he wants to see me alone on a matter of importance ; what shall I do about it ?"

" Do ?" replied Mr. Field, after reading it, " why, go and see the poor fellow of course."

" Won't people perhaps think it a little odd ?"

" I thought my Minnie was always above such tittle-tattle when any good end was to be served."

Minnie smiled, for really she had the reputation of doing odd things now and then, and riding rough-shod over the after-remarks of her neighbours. " Yes, Arthur ; but don't you think perhaps it *would* be a little odd,—considering—— ?"

" Not a bit ! I'll order the carriage now, and you shall go this very morning."

He was just going out of the room, when Minnie's real meaning flashed across him.

"What a dull fellow I always am!" he said. "Did you perhaps want to find out whether *I* would think it odd?"

"Yes, Arthur, but it is all right now; I could read from your manner what I wanted to learn."

"You did not think I distrusted you, Minnie, surely?"

"No, no, not that; but I thought you might think,—I don't know what I thought; it won't go into words."

"No, but it will go into my heart if you ever think like that again. No, Minnie, I know the whole thing. You loved him once, but followed principle rather than earthly love. It was his loss; but it has been all in all to me. And I can assure you, you can go where you like, and do what you like, and say what you like: I would trust you through everything, and I will never even think—what won't go into words."

It was the only time Minnie's first love had ever been referred to between them: they had waited long for the opportunity of manifesting the world of feeling which lay behind the words they had now spoken. Neither of them ever distrusted the other, but they each were conscious of something within themselves which made it possible to fear a shadow of distrust in the other. That possibility was now

swept away, and their little confidence, reserved as it still was in expression, had an almost sacramental effect upon them.

It was with a light heart, then, and many a prayer on her lips, that Mrs. Field drove that morning to the house that might have been hers, but was not.

CHAPTER III.

Waywardness and Independence.



NEED not describe in detail Mrs. Field's interview with Mr. Lascelles,—I must be more concerned about Edith and Julia than about their elders. Suffice it to say that, putting aside conventionalities, they conversed earnestly, soul to soul, as those only can talk who stand on the brink of the grave. He told her how her noble self-conquest at a memorable time, now long gone by, had made an impression on him which years could not efface, and he begged of her to help him to see if there was any real truth in the principles which had then been her stay. The upshot of this and of several other conversations was that Mr. Lascelles submitted to the claims of religion, and was received into the Church on his death-bed. All his property was, of course, left to Julia, but before he died he added a codicil entrusting the full care of her bringing up to Mrs. Field,—bidding his daughter remember, moreover,

that it was her solemn duty to make up out of what he left her for the years which he had spent without recognising the claims of charity.

Thus was Julia's lot thrown in with that of Edith, and their two lives must be told in a single story.

Two girls, one so reserved that even her own mother could not understand her, the other wayward, capricious, and untrained,—poor Mrs. Field! she knew her anxieties would be more than doubled with the increase of her charge. But it seemed her clear duty, and now whatever came in the guise of duty was unhesitatingly accepted. It took a long time to get Julia to submit graciously to discipline. She seemed to think it mean that anyone should ever want to interfere between her and her inclinations. Still, she was good-hearted, and with careful teaching, gradually became pious and obedient, subject only to occasional sallies, which Mrs. Field knew how to forgive from the memory of her own early years.

I think I may pass over the stage of their early girlhood ; so much in it was matter of course. Of course they went to the convent school ; and of course Edith was always top of the class, while Julia might be looked for anywhere, just as the fit took her. Of course Julia was always in scrapes, and Edith often misunderstood.

Let one case stand as a specimen. Their school was one in which the Sodality of the Children of Mary had been established. Most of the girls of the same class as our friends were already wearing the medal, but these two were not. If you had asked Sister Aldegonde why not, she would have told you, "Because Julia shan't, and Edith won't."

"It's a curious thing, Sister Aldegonde," said Mother Prioress one day (no other than Sister Mary Germaine of old times), "that a quiet, pious girl like Edith Field has not the medal."

"Yes, Mother : but those quiet waters run deep, and will not always run in the right direction."

"Have you any reason for not giving it to her?"

"None at all, except that she won't take it."

"Nonsense ; all these girls want the medal, if they can only get it. Send her to me."

Sister Aldegonde was silent and sorry. She loved Edith, though she could not analyse her, and felt instinctively that this interview would go against the girl.

"Mother Prioress wants you," she said to her. Unfortunately she said it in too significant a manner. She longed to say something to prepare her, but, not knowing how to put it, simply expressed her desire by a partial embarrassment,—which might mean anything. Edith took it to mean that the

two had combined together to put pressure on her, and, as a consequence, shrank further into her shell than ever. Mother Prioress began kindly enough, but Edith was unapproachable,—sullen, the Prioress afterwards said. To the question whether she did not wish to be a Child of Mary, she answered simply, no. When it was urged upon her, she replied that she was ready to do all that she was obliged to do, but the Church did not oblige her to become a Child of Mary.

“But, my dear girl,” said the Prioress, “don’t you know that by trying to do only what you are bound to do, you will most likely fail in doing even that?”

“Yes, Mother, I know the risk, and am prepared to run it,” was Edith’s final answer.

It was unfortunate, for it followed as a natural result that Edith was in black books after that. Such eccentricities were not thought safe. “She has a touch of her mother’s earlier years in her,” said the Prioress, “without her mother’s frankness;” and she sighed for another Father Moberley. Edith bore the black books quite contentedly, and her seeming indifference surprised and grieved all her best friends. Even Julia was roused to wonder at it; so that one day, the two being alone, Julia began :

"Edith, dear."

"Well."

"I want to ask you something ; may I?"

"Of course you may."

"But will you tell me?"

"Thereafter as the questions may be," answered Edith, with a smile.

"Well, Edith, I have been puzzling for a long time to know why you don't become a Child of Mary."

To Julia's great surprise, and I suppose to my readers' also, Edith's only answer was to burst into tears and fling her arms around her adopted sister.

"Goodness gracious Edith ! what's the matter ? What have I done ?"

Edith was not long in becoming calm again, and then said, "Julia, I am not a Child of Mary, because I was waiting for you : when you are allowed to become one, I will become one too." And not another word on the subject would Edith ever say.

You can imagine what a revelation this was to the elder girl. To think that her companion had sacrificed this honour usually so coveted, and really so coveted by her as her outburst of feeling showed,—that she should have submitted to misunderstanding and distrust so long,—and all for *her* ! She began to see things in Edith she had

never seen before, and resolved that she at least would stand in her way no longer.

It was now the nuns' turn to be astonished. Julia began to be good, and she could be frightfully good if she really set her mind to it. Week after week she kept it up, until at last Mother Prioress stopping her one day said: "I am glad to hear, Julia, that you are doing so nicely now in school. If you persevere like that, you will be able to give Edith a good example by joining the Sodality." What a hypocrite Julia felt, having to listen to praise like that! how she longed to tell Edith's secret! but she could not. She only impulsively cried out, with tears in her eyes, "Oh! Mother, *would* you let me be a Child of Mary?"

That evening at recreation, the Prioress said :

"Sister Aldegonde, what have you been doing to Julia Lascelles? I thought she was a hopeless case ; yet to-day she asked me for admission to the Sodality with more fervour than any girl ever asked me before."

"I don't know, Mother,—there is a mystery about it somewhere. But I believe that where Mrs. Field is concerned there are no hopeless cases, and where Edith is concerned there is sure to be mystery."

So Julia's name was announced as an Aspirant,

and the rosette was pinned on her shoulder on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. That same day Edith went to Mother Prioress and took her breath away by asking for the rosette as calmly as if nothing had ever been said about it.

"Ah, Edith," was the reply, "I thought *that* would shame you into it ; but have you the right motive in asking ?"

"I hope so, Mother."

"You are ashamed that Julia should be a Child of Mary, and you not, eh ?"

"Partly that, Mother."

"Then your motive is pride."

"But I do also wish it, apart from that."

"Then why did you say before that you did not wish it ?"

"Because I did not wish it then, Mother, and I do wish it now."

The Prioress shrugged her shoulders dubiously but after consultation with Sister Aldegonde the rosette was given, and Edith and Julia were together once more.

As Children of Mary, then, they grew up together into womanhood, and prepared to take their part in the life of the world. What that part was to be was a problem. Mrs. Field had always hoped that her Edith would choose that lot which

she herself had forfeited, as she thought, by her waywardness and independence. It was the subject of many a waking dream, when the little thing lay in the cradle all unconscious of the destiny of Bride of Christ which her mother was weaving for her. But as Edith grew older, her mother's hopes changed into utter uncertainty ; and Mrs. Field used to say with a sad smile that in her two girls she was well punished for her early waywardness and independence, because Julia was all made up of the first, and Edith of the second. The hopes, however, were never given up, and now and then with a mother's anxiety Mrs. Field would endeavour to feel her way into an understanding with Edith ; but in vain. The sensitive girl seemed to know from afar off by a kind of instinct what the conversation tended to, and somehow always managed to change it before coming to the point.

Some of my readers will perhaps be impatient, and say, "Why couldn't Mrs. Field ask her straight out, and have done with it?" That's all very well, but you can't cut down people's characters into any shape you like. Mrs. Field is not so impulsive now as Minnie Caldwell used to be, and it is just as well she is not. For intensity of reserve is not incompatible with intensity of affection, but it may be dangerous to affection to try and break through the

reserve. Suppose Mrs. Field had said abruptly to Edith, "Why do you keep yourself so mysterious? Why don't you tell me straight out whether or not you intend trying to enter the convent?" Edith would simply have laid down her work, opened wide her blue eyes, and replied, "Mother, darling, if ever I had such an intention, do you think I would keep it from you a single day?" Would that mean that Edith will not become a nun? Certainly not; and Mrs. Field knew it would not. Therefore she did not ask useless questions.

The two girls, then, began to take their place in society, Julia with gaiety, Edith with gravity, both with apparent satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV.

How Edith held her own.



TALKED about Edith and Julia taking their place in society, as if to say my story was not going to follow them into home life, or into the secret life of their own hearts. What would be the use? Every girl knows the routine of home-life, and how in it people may seem to casual observers to be just like one another, while they are as far apart as the poles. In fact, so much does home-life hide us, that often it is those who are nearest and dearest to us who misunderstand us most. Therefore we are going to watch them in society, as we watched Minnie before them. Society is a place where, some for one reason, some for another, people go to show themselves off. Everybody seems to say, "This is what I am; look at me." Of course everybody puts his best side out. All vices are banished there, and all virtues smile; and the whole world in society is a hypocrite, each individual in his own

degree. The inward malediction when a clumsy dancer comes down heavily on our toes is translated into a sweet smile with a bow and a "Don't mention it." And our bitter jealousy towards a successful rival is expressed in terms of cordial congratulation,—which, if it has a sting in it, was never so intended, oh dear, no ! Yet in spite of this external polish, which may be genuine or may be "humbug," according to the amount of virtue within us, it is in society that characters are most frequently and accurately read, and most easily portrayed.

That both Edith and Julia were the centres of much attraction might be inferred from our story hitherto. That they were not spoiled by this attraction, we might have guaranteed from Mrs. Field's watchful care, as well as their own faithfulness. Everybody liked them, except some of their lady acquaintances, who put Edith down as haughty, Julia as flighty.

Their Uncle Alfred used to watch over them with special pride ; having no daughters of his own, these were to him as a kind of substitute. He used to delight specially in Edith's repartees. On one occasion, for instance, he was present when a young gentleman made one of those dubious remarks, which are tolerated in Protestant society, but which jar so painfully on a Catholic conscience. Edith

showed her displeasure in her face, whereupon the young man turned to her, and said, "You look awfully grave, Miss Field; I hope I have not shocked you." She replied; "You know best whether you have shocked me or not: if you have, it's very bad taste to allude to it again; and if you haven't, it's very bad taste to allude to it at all." These incisive remarks of hers always stung the more, because they were unexpected. Her reserve gave her the appearance of being shy, and she was often spoken to as such, when the self-possession of her reply would act like an electric shock. Uncle Alfred was, at one of these assemblies, once met by a youth, who, not knowing his relationship to Edith, accosted him and said, "Do you know that girl over there near the corner?"

"Yes," said Alfred, mischievously, "I have met her occasionally."

"Well, isn't she a Tartar?"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Oh, never mind, just go and try her yourself."

So Alfred came up laughing, and said,—

"Upon my word, Edith, you remind me of my old cat."

"Me, Uncle! how?"

"Have you never seen her sitting about with a mild expression as if butter wouldn't melt in her

mouth? Well, she never looks more innocent and demure than just after polishing off a mouse."

"That does not enlighten me," said Edith.

"No? Why, here you sit looking as simple and shy as a child, and a poor unfortunate fellow comes up for a bit of fun, and you send him away with a flea in his ear, and then go on looking just as simple and shy as ever."

"Well, but those young men are so irresistibly silly, Uncle."

"Thanks for the compliment; it's not more than twenty years since I was a young man myself. But what was the matter with this youth in particular?"

"Oh, I think he took me for a school-girl first, and then began to chaff me, and afterwards asked me to waltz; at last, after putting me some riddles and several other foolish questions, he said he would like to know what I most longed for at the present moment, so I looked him straight in the face, and answered, 'Solitude.' He took the hint and departed."

There was another, a Mr. Noodle, whom Edith soon found to be deficient in mental power; long words always floored him. He came up and put in a claim for a waltz.

"I can't waltz," was the reply.

"Not waltz, Miss Field? Why, it isn't so hard : just let me show you the step."

"Oh, you are mistaken, Mr. Noodle, I understand the dance well enough : my incapacity arises from extraneous causes."

"Oh, ah, indeed ; I beg your pardon." And it turned out afterwards (in fact, he made a half apology about it to Uncle Alfred) that he thought it was her spine was affected, or something of that sort.

So that we see Edith was well able to hold her own in that armed neutrality which is the natural attitude of the Christian towards worldly society. And Julia was kept steady by Edith's influence.

CHAPTER V.

A talk about the world.

MY readers must not imagine that Edith and Julia's lives *consisted* of external gaieties. Mrs. Field saw to it that they were usefully employed ; and moreover their own home was so happy, that the real treat for them soon came to be when they had neither visitors, nor anywhere to go to. In proportion, however, as the novelty of society wore off, these treats of homeliness became rarer and rarer, because society becomes more exacting the longer you are in it. So that they were most deeply involved in the world's ways just when they had begun to cease to care for them. It is so with more things than society ; "the chains of habit are often too light to be felt until they become too strong to be broken !"

The revelation of this state of mind came, as such revelations usually did, first from Julia. One evening,—it was one of their "treats,"—the three

were working away, while Mr. Field was lying on the sofa, as is the lazy way of the lords of the creation, with his arms folded behind his head, and taking a mild interest in things in general. There had been a spell of silence, when Julia with an exclamation of impatience pushed aside her work,—I will not venture on a guess as to what the work was, but I know it was some part of the dress wanted for the next garden-party, dress-making being one of the accomplishments Mrs. Field had insisted on for both of them.

"I don't think I shall go to this business at all," she said. Mr. Field raised his eyebrows inquiringly, turned his head slightly on his arms, and said, "Hullo, Julia, what's up? Pricked your finger?" This attempt to assign a cause for her deep spiritual trouble, Julia treated with silent scorn.

"Why do you say so, Julia? you promised to go, you know," interposed Mrs. Field.

"Yes, Mother, but if my dress isn't ready, I can't go, can I? and if I don't work at it any more, it won't be ready. So I should be able to say truly that I cannot go, and excuses could easily be found."

"They would not be quite honest excuses, would they, Julia? But why don't you want to go?"

"Oh, my dear," put in Mr. Field, "it's all non-

sense ; a bit of affectation. She wants to go all along, only, like the people who always have a cold when asked to sing, she wants to be pressed. She is tired of going voluntarily ; she wants to have the new sensation of being coy over it. Isn't that it, Looloo ? ”

Julia gave a sigh of resignation, and took up her work once more. Both Mr. Field's suggestions had too much truth in them not to sting, and the second one really annoyed her. But she was too well trained to express this annoyance towards one whom she had so long regarded as a father ; so she merely sighed. Only, as a sigh was her usual way of showing annoyance, it came to much the same thing. So Mr. Field rose, and said, “Come, Julia, I did not mean to hurt your feelings ; I was only chaffing. You can go or stay just as you like, and I won't impute any more motives. Kiss me and make friends.” Julia responded with a hug ; and Mr. Field left the room saying that he had an appointment with Uncle Alfred at the club.

The other three continued the conversation.

“Really, Mother,” said Julia, “I do think I am getting too worldly. This constant going out, and all the nonsense one has to speak and hear, is telling on me,—can't help telling on me.”

“Well, Julia, just let us think that out now, and

if you prove what you say, of course you will not only be allowed to stay, but it would be your duty. You say, 'all the nonsense you have to speak and hear ;' I did not know that hearing nonsense was wrong: sometimes it is a great charity to listen to it. But who compels you to *spea*k it yourself?"

"Oh, Mother, you know what I mean; you know how one gets drawn in."

"Yes, Julia, dear, I know" (this with a slight sigh), "but I know also that it is because of selfishness; whereas society ought to be a school of unselfishness."

"Selfishness?" echoed Julia, dubiously.

"Yes, it is only those whose minds are filled with their own ease and pleasure who are spoiled by the world. The reason why your father and I wish you to take your part in society is that you may finish your education, by carrying out those lessons of virtue and behaviour which you have learnt, and by improving your mind through contact with others. If you looked upon your going out as a duty, instead of as a pleasure, as you seem now to be doing, you would probably find half your difficulties vanishing. Pleasure is the selfish view: duty the unselfish one."

"Well, then," grumbled Julia, "I can't help it, but

I suppose I am horribly selfish. At any rate I feel as if all this were doing me harm."

"Indeed, Julia, it is doing you a great deal less harm now than it was at first, when you were too absorbed in it to think of the harm. And it was only because I knew the first flush would soon pass away that I did not check you then. Now that you don't care for it so much, you can begin to moralise, you see. So I hope the moral you will draw will be to look upon your goings out as so many opportunities of giving innocent pleasure to others, instead of getting it for yourself."

So far Edith had listened in silence ; now she put in, "I am afraid, Mamma, that there is another way of resisting the world, not so innocent as yours."

"And that is——?"

"And that is the way I fear I have been taking,—the way of pride. When Julia confessed to talking nonsense, I could not help flattering myself that I, at least, never talked it. But my reason certainly has been because I feel above that sort of thing."

"So both my children have something to learn, as their mother had before them," said Mrs. Field; "and before we leave society, let us see if we can't learn it in society. We'll go to this garden-party, and examine our consciences over it afterwards. If we talk nonsense all the time, Julia, we shall be

wrong ; and if we are too grand to talk a little nonsense now and then to please others, Edith, we shall be wrong again."

So they went to the garden-party, and I suppose nothing much happened either way, for they never afterwards compared notes about the results of their self-examination. I daresay Julia and Edith felt they had done enough in the way of confession, and Mrs. Field felt she had done enough in the way of sermonising. Nevertheless, we may presume that neither confession nor sermonising was without its fruit in due season.

CHAPTER VI.

Romance.



FEEL that some of my readers are objecting that Edith's story is progressing without much romance. It makes it so commonplace, you know, when there is no touch of the romantic. For there is no doubt that both Edith and Julia were sure to have their romantic side, and all this going out and gaiety must have developed some degree of it. True: I suppose I must confess that a girl's life cannot be told without romance of some kind. I know some girls who are kept dreadfully isolated, and never read novels, and yet are as romantic as girls can well be.

But I must beg my readers to remember that there is a heavenly, as well as an earthly, romance; and sometimes the former seizes on a youthful mind before the latter, and lifts it into a region far above that of stories of fiction. Surely there is nothing half so romantic as Our Lord's wooing, and

caressing, and winning of souls ; but it is too close to us, too real, too sacred, to make a story of. What would you say if this were the only romance in the lives of these two girls? Your instinct tells you that it wasn't? Well, so far your instinct is right. I only wanted to show you their characters before telling their life's choice.

That some romance or other was impending, we might guess from a conversation between two young men of the neighbourhood.

"Nice girls those two, aren't they?" said Mr. Greaves to Mr. Perry, as they passed the Fields' house.

"Ye-e-s," replied Mr. Perry, hesitatingly.

"What an answer to give," rejoined the other, "for a man who is head over ears in love."

"Nonsense."

"Well, I certainly thought you were a bit smitten in that quarter."

"Yes, I don't mind confessing to *a bit*,—not hopelessly, though," said Mr. Perry.

"I thought so, Perry ; but, my dear fellow, you haven't a ghost of a chance."

"Why, are you going in?"

"Not me, thanks, no ; but if ever you want to have a chance, I advise you to turn Papist."

"You don't say so ! Are they so bigoted?"

"Bigoted! there's no name for it. Why, the mother refused an awfully good match once, and you may bet she'd make the girls do the same. Besides, I know."

"Oh, yes, you know a lot; but you'll not get me to believe that a girl will refuse a fellow she cares for just for that. Mothers may say what they like, but a girl takes a good offer when she gets it. Anyway, I am going to try."

He did try; and, unfortunately for himself, it was Edith whom he tried. It was in vain he pleaded; her answer came short and sharp,—she couldn't think of it. Believing it was a mere sectarian scruple standing in his way,—he was too vain to see the real truth, or to read it beneath the tones of her voice,—he would not take no for an answer at all at first, but gaily pressed his suit to the bounds of urgency. She heard him as before,—and then answered as before. At length he let fall some expression about its being hard that hearts should be separated for mere differences in belief,—“If I were a Catholic now—.” This brought Edith up in arms; there was no reason, she said, why she could not marry a non-Catholic, all conditions being duly observed. But since Mr. Perry had so indelicately endeavoured to probe her reasons for the refusal which she had a right to

give, he should have them. (All this was not said in a set speech ; it came out in bits, as such things do in real life.) Let not Mr. Perry lay the flattering unction to his soul that he was refused merely because he was a non-Catholic ; let it be clearly understood that it was because she didn't like him. Of course, Mr. Perry replied, he was bound to bow before such a decision ; he begged pardon, he had thought she was refusing on principle and not from dislike.

“Nay, but since you press the matter, Mr. Perry, it *was* on principle, but not the principle you thought. I do not say I dislike you as a man, but in the matter of which you now speak I am bound to dislike you on principle.”

Mr. Perry said he was not aware of having done anything to forfeit Miss Field's esteem.


“Not aware, Mr. Perry ! then perhaps I should tell you. I have heard your companions speak of you, and it is always with more of familiarity than of respect. I gather that you are looked on only in the light of a boon companion, and I know enough of human nature to feel sure that a ‘boon companion’ will not make a good husband. That's why !”

Cheeky girl ! I fancy I hear some of my readers say. Well, but you must remember that Mr. Perry

had pushed matters rather far, and Edith was not without a temper of her own. At any rate, what she said was true enough, and Mr. Perry departed more enlightened than flattered. Thus ended Edith's first romance.

CHAPTER VII.

More of it.

 ROMANCE is like misfortune, at least in this, that it never rains but it pours. In fact, one shower brings on another. Mr. Perry's having tried and failed was at first only a secret between him and his friend ; but girls are not the only people who don't keep secrets, and somehow the little affair leaked out. There was some good-humoured joking about it, and poor Perry had to try to laugh it off. Regardless of the fable of the sour grapes, he said he was quite glad he had not succeeded,—“A regular shrew, by George! I am sorry for the fellow who gets hold of *her*.” But no one believed him, and so Edith matriculated with honours in the world's university of romance.

Let us play the spy upon another conversation. Mr. Armitage was a young Catholic of the neighbourhood, and being a frequent visitor at the Fields', was of course pointed out by rumour as the destined

choice of one of them. But which? There was the rub. Why he couldn't have told you himself, to save his life. I think there is a song that says:—

“How happy could I be with either,
Were t'other dear charmer away.”

That was just the matter with Armitage, and so he was talking the whole affair over with his friend, Mr. Clare, who lived in the serene atmosphere of indifference, not being even acquainted with the girls. A rather flippant fellow was Clare, but now and then he happened on a good suggestion; so Armitage used to take counsel with him, in spite of his chaff.

“So you see, Clare, after balancing all things, I can't tell what on earth to do.”

“Then don't do anything.”

“What do you mean?”

“Marry someone else.”

“No, no; that would never do.”

“Well, then, toss up between them; here goes: heads Edith, tails Julia,—it's tails.”

“Nonsense, Clare, do be serious.”

“I am as serious as an owl,” said Clare impatiently, for he began to be tired of the subject; “give me some hints on their characters, then I can help you out; but moderation, please, none of your angelic perfections.”

"All right," laughed Armitage. "Well, Julia is more frank and open, but is more on the surface; Edith is harder to get at, but has more in her."

"H'm, I see; one of those girls whom you have always to guess at like a riddle, and generally have to give them up in the end,—that's one for Julia; don't marry a Sphinx whatever you do. What more?"

"Edith is moved more by ideas; Julia by affections."

"That's number two for Julia."

"Why?"

"Why, man, of course; your wife's ideas wouldn't be your ideas; you'd have a rival then; she'd be more wedded to her own notions than to you, and you'd have to play second fiddle. Whereas your wife's affections *would* be your affections, and there's all the difference. But, my good fellow, here's a thing that will settle it. Julia was an only daughter, and her father was a wealthy man; she must have money. If they are otherwise quits, surely that is a reason."

"Has money, has she? By Jove, I never thought of that before; that does settle it with a vengeance."

And so the confab came to an abrupt termination.

Now I know some of my readers are beginning to despise this young Armitage, first for not knowing his own mind ; and secondly for being decided at last by money considerations. But be careful ; rash judgments are dangerous. For as a matter of fact, it is not always so easy to make up your mind, in great things even more than in small. I, for instance, have never been able to tell which of Milton's two poems I prefer, "L'Allegro" or "Il Penseroso." I always prefer the one I read last, until I begin the other. Why then could not two people have so powerful an influence on Mr. Armitage that the attraction of either should always prevail until he came within range of the other, and that in case of a conjunction of influences the attractions should be neutralised ? And further, your judgment is premature, for I have not told you what he made up his mind to do. In reality what he had resolved upon was, *not* to propose to Julia. He had a kind of instinct,—he never explained it to himself, so I am not bound to explain it for him,—that he did not want to marry a woman richer than himself. And he shrank, not only from the possibility of others imputing to him the motive of money, but even from the possibility of a sense of money-satisfaction creeping into, and therefore to his mind spoiling, the beauty and dis-

interestedness of wedded love. So he resolved to propose to Edith.

And, as it seemed, it was just as well ; for Julia herself had taken a new turn. Just about this time the Passionist Fathers had come down to preach a Mission, and of course everybody went. The sermons were earnest and eloquent, and the people responded with heartiness. Sinners went to the Sacraments ; the devout became more devout ; and great good was done. To Julia the Mission culminated when Father Adalbert preached a beautiful sermon on Vocation. She was on fire with it.

“ Didn’t I say some time ago we were getting too worldly ? It must have been this unconscious longing in my heart. Edith, dear, what do you think of it ? I don’t think I should resist any longer ; I ought to be a nun.”

“ What do I think ? I think we had better discuss it this time six months, Looloo, darling.”

[It was part of Edith’s gentle way, though all unconscious, to use this endearing expression whenever she had to throw cold water on any of Julia’s aspirations : it took away the sting.]

But Julia’s ardour was not to be damped ; at least Edith must come with her and talk it over with Father Adalbert. So they went. Of course the good Father was delighted with such fervour

and piety. God gives special graces, he said, in times of Mission ; and vocation is one of them ; and Julia showed every sign of a real and solid one. Julia of course was triumphant, and pitied Edith's cautious reserve from the bottom of her heart.

" And your sister—?" said the Missioner, turning towards Edith, who had hitherto said nothing. " Has she not thought over it yet ?"

" How could I help thinking over it, Father ?"

" And are you going to follow your sister's good example ?"

" I shall leave events to determine themselves, Father ; I am not excited about it."

She spoke coldly, and with a touch of sarcasm,—which was unbecoming ; still it is true, and she felt even more sarcasm than she expressed. Her attitude struck Father Adalbert, and in a later interview he rather pressed upon her the claims of the religious life. This was a proceeding which had always been intensely distasteful to Edith, and this time there was even some asperity in her tone, as she answered, " Father, I will promise nothing. You urge this state of life on me, when in reality you know nothing about me ; my ordinary confessor knows all about me, and gives me all the advice I want." Not an admirable speech ; but it was Edith.

So it was arranged, then, that Julia was to become a nun, and Edith to remain in the world. Nor did Julia make any secret of her part of the programme, and consequently it soon got to Mr. Armitage's ears. His first impulse was to be sorry; his next thought was that it was a good thing he had already elected to ask Edith: "I shall have my own choice anyway,—it was not forced on me." So on mature consideration he determined that he was glad, and told Julia so. And Julia favoured him with a rhapsody on the beauty of the religious life, and how happy she was. And he said, yes, it was a wonderful life for some people, but it didn't suit him, and he shouldn't have thought it would suit her, if she hadn't told him so herself: since it did suit her, he wished her God speed.

Perhaps my readers are expecting the account of what Mr. Armitage now said to Edith, and how she took it. I shall partly disappoint them, for at the time when I introduce them in conversation, the eventful avowal had already been made and answered,—negatively. And Edith was saying:

"Mr. Armitage, do you mind my speaking to you frankly and freely as a friend?"

No, of course he did not.

"Then tell me honestly and in confidence, were you not wavering whether to ask Julia or me?"

"I was," replied Mr. Armitage, rather staggered by the directness of the question.

"Well, Mr. Armitage, I don't know what determined you to ask me, but you made a mistake. I know you well, and *I know* you love Julia more than me. Now, don't talk : I'm going to have my say. You and Julia are just suited for one another ; she would make you a loving and a happy wife ; and you would understand one another. You wouldn't understand me, I should sometimes respond to your affection with a reserve which would be strange to you,—I can't help it,—and you would sometimes think I was unhappy, and that I know you could not bear. Moreover, Mr. Armitage, I am very exacting ; and when I marry, it would be very difficult to satisfy me except with the utmost perfection. You would not have your wife dissatisfied with you, would you ? Now look here : no one in the wide world knows that you have asked me : no one shall know it. You can trust me, can't you, in spite of what they say of woman's tongue ? So be reasonable : confess in your heart that you made a mistake, that you really love Julia more ; and be grateful to me for giving you the chance of doing it over again and doing it right, as they say in school. What do you say ?"

"What I say, Miss Field, is that you have the

most extraordinary way of looking at things of anybody I ever met."

Edith only smiled, then added, "Ah, but I haven't done yet : you see I am going to take the part of a disinterested friend. Now, do tell me, what was it that finally decided you to ask me and not Julia."

Mr. Armitage resorted to some fencing here, but Edith's directness would not be avoided, and it came out finally about the money.

"Now that's just what I thought, and what I wanted to hear from you. It justifies the opinion I have always had of you. Mr. Armitage, I will not say I am proud, but I do feel truly honoured by the proposal you have made me to-day. And since you have so confided in me, let me tell you, what no one else has ever heard from me, that it has long been my fixed resolve not to marry at all. Had it been otherwise, I should have been in a great fix to-day. Love and inclination might have contended against friendship and honour; and I fear me I might have said yes, to Julia's cost. You have now made me talk more freely than I ever talked before, but after this we must be ever as we have been, with our mutual regard only deepened by the memory of to-day."


She held out her hand as if to end the interview. Mr. Armitage said nothing,—had no words where-

with to answer her,—and she knew it, and interpreted his silence aright. But after a pause, he exclaimed, ‘It’s all very well to say, go and ask Julia, when everybody knows she is going to be a nun.’ Edith broke into one of her brightest smiles, and said, ‘Well, there have been so many confidences flying about; let me give you one more. I know my dear little sister rather better than you do. So take my advice: come to see us as before, sympathise with her in her grand aspirations, draw out all her enthusiasm, and in less than three months she will say yes, when you ask her what you have asked me to-day.’

I wonder if anyone is shocked at my heroine’s wily advice. What a shame to lay a plot to spoil so promising a vocation! But I think Edith was right. Her prophecy certainly turned out true. She knew well that Julia was not the stuff that nuns are made of, and to her dying day she used to say that one of the few good deeds of her life was when she turned Julia from being a sentimental and unsatisfactory nun into a good wife and loving mother.

CHAPTER VIII.

What came of it all.

Y story may well draw to a close now. What more is there to say? Why should I tell how Julia's grand ideal gradually faded away, until she herself recognised that it had only been an impulse?

"You mustn't laugh at me, Edith; but I don't think I shall ever be a nun after all," she said one day.

"I never thought you would, Julia, dear."

"No, I know you didn't; but please don't think me silly now."

"Indeed I do not; but I do think you very impulsive. In fact, I often envy you your impulses."

"You envy me, Edith? Impossible!"

"Yes, I do; why this same beautiful impulse of yours, what a lot of happiness and what a lot of grace it has brought you! and all without any effort of yours,—the impulse carried you away with it. While, poor me! I have to think, and calculate,

and weigh consequences, and shudder at possibilities, and struggle with misgivings ; and so, if ever I do anything, most of the merit and nearly all the happiness has vanished in the process."

"Yes, but then my impulses come to nothing ; your calculations don't."

"Still I envy, because when one of your impulses comes to an end, off you go with another ; whereas if my calculations fail, on one point at least, then I have nothing before me but to become wretched."

Julia did not as a rule dive deep into people's meanings, otherwise she would have asked what the *one point at least* meant ; but she caught a more than ordinary seriousness in Edith's tone, and with a great outburst and display of affection, she said, "Well, Edith, there is one impulse of mine that will never die out, and that is to love you with my whole heart ; and if ever you go wretched, I'll go wretched too from sympathy."

I don't know how Julia's change became known to Mr. Armitage ; there is an instinct about these things, I suppose. At any rate, matters were soon arranged to everybody's satisfaction, and the marriage was appointed for an early date. Only one conversation I must report :

"Geoffrey," said Julia one day (that was Mr. Armitage's name—I believe she afterwards came

to call him "Jeff"), "Geoffrey, there's something I want to talk to you about."

"Well?"

"You know my father left me a good deal of property."

"Yes, I know, but I'm not going to talk about that ; I have arranged with Mr. Field. Of course there will be a contract ; never mind about these business affairs."

"That's all very well, Mr. Impetuous,—you are getting almost as impulsive as myself. But you can't shake off your responsibilities so lightly as all that; unless, perhaps, you have taken it upon yourself to arrange with Mr. Field about my conscience as well as my money."

"Why, what has conscience to do with it?"

"A great deal: my father did not only leave me property, he left it me bound up in a conscience-clause." She then told him how a codicil had been added to her father's will, reminding her of her duty to atone for his long neglect of the claims of charity. "I have always left the carrying out of this, on any great scale, until I should come of age, but now I think we had better arrange it together."

"But I don't see what I have to do with it, Julia."

"I tell you, Geoffrey, I won't have any ante-

nuptial contracts. If I do any harm with my money, you must share the harm ! if I do any good with it you must share the good. Now don't argue ; all the reasons in the world won't move me : if you and Mr. Field together talked at me all day, I wouldn't change. Don't be obstinate."

Mr. Armitage smiled, as who should say " what then is obstinacy ? " They discussed the matter together, and, one idea leading to another, they at length determined upon a plan which should satisfy the claims at once of charity, of affection, and of gratitude.

But before I tell it, I must return to Edith. A great change had come over her too. Her life seemed to have suddenly opened out, just as a growth proceeding slowly in spite of winter chill quickly throws out all its powers at the touch of Spring. She no longer shrank into self. The power of reserve and the force it gives to character she ever retained, but the wall between her and those who loved her was thenceforward thrown down. Why or how this came about I am not going to say. Had romance anything to do with it ? Be that as it may, I only know it did come about. And the first sign she showed of it kept Mrs. Field awake half the night with joy. She had laid aside all reserve and told her mother all her

hopes and fears, all her desires for the future ; and she, poor wayward Minnie of the days of old, recognised more fully than ever the strength and persistency of this girl whom God had given her to bear, and whom she thanked God she had been able to direct aright. Poor Minnie! she had now to make up her mind to lose both her daughters at once. Edith would only wait until Julia should be married : she would stand bridesmaid for her, and then would enter the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. "The same dress will do for two ceremonies," she said, smiling, "I must begin beforehand to practise holy poverty."

It was after this, her destination, had been decided on that that conversation between Geoffrey and Julia had taken place. And the plan they had hit upon was no other than this,—that a large share of Julia's property should be offered to the Sisters of Charity as a dowry for Edith, on condition that they should use it to establish a foundation in the town, and that Edith should stay in it. Julia was as proud as could be over this plan,—Edith herself would not have to go to a distant convent ; Mr. Field not having to pay a dowry, would be better able to pay his sons' way at college ; in every way it was splendid, but the knowledge of all the works of mercy which her gift rendered possible, was to

Julia the chief consideration of all. In fact the contemplation of this almost gave her another impulse, viz., to join Edith,—only that Geoffrey of hers wouldn't hear of it.

Need I say that Edith persevered? If you go now to the town where the beautiful convent has arisen from Julia's gift, and ask the poor about Sister Agatha, you will see a light in their eyes which will tell you more than my pages have told.

Minnie herself says that she almost hopes she shall become destitute in her declining days, that Sister Agatha may nurse her.

A COMMONPLACE GIRL.

A COMMONPLACE GIRL.

CHAPTER I.

In School.



IN the notebook left by Father Moberley, whom my readers will remember as Minnie Caldwell's friend, I find the materials for the story of the life of two sisters. I add what I have learnt from elsewhere, especially such things as Father Moberley would not tell about himself, and present the story in my own words.

Mary Anne Jackson and her sister Laura were as different as different could be, in both appearance and character. Laura was good-looking and attractive, lively in manner, quick-witted, and clever. Out of any dozen girls she would be the first you would notice. Therefore she was the object of quiet envy to her elder sister, Mary Anne,—it would be more than human virtue if she were not. For Mary Anne was not striking in any way. Hers

was one of those faces which you meet a dozen times before you know them ; she was not pretty, and not ugly, she was just ordinary. It is true that when you got to know her well, you found that she had a sweet and lovable expression, but the fact remains that if you saw her only once, you would probably never think of her again. . This was not all. Mary Anne was decidedly dull. Her industry saved her from being very low in her class at school, but she never got very high either ; and her younger sister was always above her,—nay, was sometimes injudiciously held up to her as an example. When anybody had to be chosen from the class for any post of distinction, Mary Anne was never thought of. It was not that they purposely neglected her ; it was simply that she never entered their heads. On the other hand, if on the prize-day they wanted some trivial service done away from the platform by one who would not be missed, it was felt that poor Mary Anne was just the right one in the right place.

She only got one prize at school,—it was for good conduct. Laura's name had been called again and again ; and on her face, flushed with triumph—perhaps she hardly meant it—there stole a pitying smile at the solitary call of her sister's name. Mary Anne saw it, and saw the same smile reflected on many other faces in both school and audience.

Father Moberley saw it too,—he was giving out the prizes that day,—so he leant forward and whispered so that she alone could hear, “Cheer up, my child ! I’d rather have your one little prize than Laura’s whole armful.” From that day forward her heart was bound to Father Moberley. No one had ever so encouraged her before,—not, I repeat, because anyone was unkind to her, but merely because it never struck anyone that she wanted encouragement. She had accommodated herself so meekly to her position, that people never dreamt of her not being satisfied.

And yet she had often murmured to herself, “Why must it be always Laura—Laura? *She* always pushed forward? *She* always taken notice of? *Her* tastes and fancies always consulted, and mine never?” Fortunately her murmurings did not carry her far. She knew that conscious envy was a sin, and sin she always shrank from. So she generally consoled herself with some such reflection as this : “Poor Laura ! why should I grudge her anything? She can’t help being pretty, and clever, and attractive, and I can’t help being plain and dull ; so I must just make up my mind to be contented with being a commonplace girl.” Her mind, however, took a good deal of making up, and she did not get quite contented.

One day, after some unusual neglect, she was sitting alone, with tears in her eyes, brooding over her fancied wrong, when Sister Rose came in. Now Sister Rose was her favourite among the nuns, the only one who had ever gained her confidence, the only one indeed who thought she had any confidence to gain. Yet even to her Mary Anne had never opened the discontent of her life. This time she was caught in the very act of crying, and it was no use saying there was nothing the matter.

"What is troubling you, dear?" said the Sister.

"Nothing, Sister,—at least, nothing special."

"Something in general, then, eh? perhaps that's worse. But I hope it is nothing you won't talk about. Troubles are often halved by being shared, you know."

"You will only laugh at me if I tell you, Sister."

"Now, Mary Anne, did I ever laugh at you?"

"No, *you* are always kind to me."

"Well, tell me, then," said Sister Rose, ignoring the special emphasis.

"It's only that I have been feeling slighted."

"Well, my dear girl, that's a real cause of pain certainly, if it was intentional. But I know nobody here who would treat you so. They all like you, I think."

"At least they don't dislike me."

"That's the same thing, isn't it?"

"Indeed, it's not the same thing, Sister. They don't dislike me, because they don't think of me. I'm not worth either liking or disliking. Nobody misses me, now I am away from recreation. You are the only one, Sister, who thinks me worth caring for."

"No, now don't say such things, Mary Anne," replied Sister Rose, rather puzzled at this unusual burst of feeling: "I am surprised you even think them."

"Think them, Sister! they are thrust upon me every day of my life. I don't want to grumble, but you made me talk. The fact is, I am nothing but a horribly ordinary girl, and everybody treats me as such, and I don't like it. It's all pride, you know, and I know it too; and yet I never can get reconciled to seeing other people made much of, and poor me always thrust into the background."

"Other people, Mary Anne? I wonder if by other people you mean Laura?"

A deep blush showed that the guess was not far wrong; but no further answer was given, and Sister Rose went on,

"Well, my dear, let us look into your difficulty a little. These things you know are often like ghosts, vanishing as soon as you fix the eye on them."

What is your tremendous objection to being ordinary, or to being in the background?"

"Ah, now you're talking just like Father Moberley, Sister. You won't catch me like that. I'll think it all over by myself. Never mind me any more."

The Sister was too prudent to push the conversation any further, so taking the girl's hand she said :

"Do you think, dear, that it is impossible for any one to have an extraordinary affection for an ordinary girl?"

"I never found it possible yet, Sister."

"Will you let me try to prove it possible?"

"Oh, Sister, if you only would, I should become another creature. I think I might even cease to be commonplace."

"That's just it," said Sister Rose, kissing her warmly. "Don't you see that real love always has the power of lifting the soul above the commonplace, and that nothing else has? And you, poor child, have never tried either loving or being loved, and here you are bemoaning yourself as if life weren't worth living."

"Ah, Sister Rose, if you will really love me, will never be so foolish any more."

So the friendship was sealed, and Mary Anne thought her heart had never been so light before

as she bounded off to rejoin her companions. She found them on the archery lawn, and was greeted with a cry, "Why, Mary Anne, where *have* you been? We have been wanting you to pick up the arrows for us." Another day she would have thought, "Ah, in the background again, of course!" But this time she picked up the arrows quite cheerfully, while the others shot. Towards the end of the time someone said, "Won't you take a shot or two, Mary Anne?" And Laura answered for her with a merry laugh, "Why, Mary Anne wouldn't even hit the target," at the same time landing one herself in the bull's eye. Even this did not make Mary Anne angry, and she joined quite heartily in the laugh at her own expense.

CHAPTER II.

In Society.



It is not to be expected that a single conversation will make a radical change in a girl's life. It may do so, of course ; but as a rule it does not. Our real vital moral changes are the result of many seemingly fruitless attempts. So that if any of my readers thought that after this one talk with Sister Rose, Mary Anne was suddenly raised out of the region of commonplace, henceforward to live a kind of glorified life, they were mistaken. Things went better for a while, and Mary Anne was far more contented with her lot than heretofore. But of course the real cause of all her murmuring was ever at hand. Laura was always with her, but not Sister Rose.

In fact, even this, her friendship, became a new source of grief to her. It was hardly to be expected that the special affection shown by Sister Rose towards Mary Anne would pass unnoticed ;

and there are some girls who always put it down to favouritism if they are punished, or even if they do not get the best of everything. Thus, exaggerated reports soon found their way to headquarters, and poor Sister Rose was rebuked for her imprudence. An earnest effort to explain about Mary Anne was construed into an attempt at self-defence, and severely cut short,—and so the promising friendship was nipped in the bud. It was not easy to give full explanations, so Mary Anne relapsed into her old ways, and shrank more into herself than ever. “It’s just my luck,” she said, “I knew the bit of sunshine wouldn’t last. I’m just destined for humdrum nothingness ; all I’m good for is to act as a foil to somebody else.”

Of course when they left school, she became even more of a foil than before. Laura was quite an acquisition to any company, and Mary Anne was often invited for her sake. Hostesses, when they asked Mr. So-and-So to take the elder Miss Jackson down to supper, would do it with a little apology. Of course Mary Anne did not hear this, she would only feel it, and then with her primmest air of reserve, would make Mr. So-and-So suffer for the hostess.

Once she let her vengeance light on Laura herself. Some people, finding her rather a drawback, used to leave her out of their invitations altogether ;

and as she never said a word, everyone thought she acquiesced. Laura would say, "Mary Anne doesn't care for these things, do you, Mary Anne?" And without giving her time to answer, she ran on, "There, you see ; what did I say? Queer taste, eh?—you know, she likes moping and darning stockings, and that sort of thing." Well, since people like to be rude, when they can do it with impunity, Mrs. and Miss Laura Jackson used to be invited, until after a while with a certain set the elder sister's very existence was forgotten. From one of this set came an invitation one day for Mrs. and Miss Jackson. It was for something quite out of the common, and Laura was in high spirits, until Mary Anne quietly remarked, "You're taking a good deal upon yourself, Laura ; don't you see that the invitation is for me?" It came like a thunderbolt ; and such an argument followed ! How could she? why, she hardly knew the people! she knew they didn't invite *her* ; and it was perfectly horrid of her : and how could she be so mean and selfish? To all which Mary Anne simply replied that she was only asserting her right : she had the right to go and go she would. Laura offered wildly to write and ask Mrs. Botherington which of the two she meant. Whereupon Mary Anne suggested that it would be very much like fishing,—

and that she might as well send a circular round while she was about it: "Miss *Laura* Jackson [with double emphasis on the *Laura*] open to all invitations." Which speech did not improve matters. However, Mary Anne went, and Laura sulked at home.

It is doubtful which of the two was the more miserable. I myself think the former. Mrs. Botherington was annoyed, for she had counted on Laura, whose absence now caused a gap not easy to fill. Two or three people had been asked on purpose to meet Miss Jackson, and Mrs. Botherington could not explain without revealing her own rudeness. So she greeted Mary Anne with a stony stare and wet-blanket shake of the hand that made her shiver, made several remarks aloud when she thought Mary Anne was listening to her (as she was), and managed to isolate her for most of the evening. That was what she got by asserting her rights. And then the next day, Laura was wrathful and wouldn't speak, and Mrs. Jackson was pained, and Mary Anne was disgusted with herself, and her father went out to his club saying he didn't like Quakers' meetings. And all this while there was the uncomfortable feeling, "It is I who have caused all this disturbance; and I shall have to put things right again."

The result of her deliberations was a resolve to go and see Father Moberley.

"Did I do wrong, Father?" she asked, when the whole story had been told.

"Wrong according to what law?"

"Oh, you know, Father. I mean, had I a right to do as I did? Was it a sin?"

"Well, you had a perfect right to do what you did,—and yet it was a sin."

"That sounds like a riddle, Father."

"Then do you remember what St. Paul says, 'Charity seeketh not her own.' There are times when we are bound to forego our legal or social rights for charity's sake. In this case, people had no right to ignore you, and Laura has no right to let you be ignored,—but now, what have you gained by insisting on your right?"

After a pause, Father Moberley resumed, "The fact is, Mary Anne, that the whole difficulty lies deeper. For years back you have been taking life by the wrong end."

Mary Anne here shrank back a little at the thought of having been studied so closely "for years back."

"You see, my child," he went on, "God created you and Laura differently. He made you a violet, and Laura a pansy,—one for sweetness, the other

for show. Now by nature you have a tremendous power of diffusing sweetness around unobserved, like the violet ; only you will insist on trying to spread yourself out like a pansy. Go back now, and take in charity with you, and be content to be one of God's violets."

The result of this interview was that Mary Anne went to her sister's room : "Look here, Laura," she said, "don't let's quarrel over this. I insisted on going to that affair, because I thought people have no right to ignore me ; and I don't think that you are right in letting your elder sister be ignored. At the same time I know I was nasty in the way I did it, and I am sorry for that. And I know I deprived you of a great pleasure, and I am sorry for that too. The Botheringtons made me perfectly miserable, if that's any consolation to you ; and I promise you I'll never stand in your way again."

Reconciliation followed, and after that it was understood that Mary Anne would contentedly play second fiddle, and that Laura would refuse to go where her sister was ignored.

Mary Anne thought long and often on Father Moberley's words, that she should be content to be one of God's violets. She saw on how false a basis she had been trying to build her life, and

made great efforts to realise the new ideal set before her,—an ideal all the more attractive because it was somewhat flattering. Poor Mary Anne ! it was perhaps the first time since babyhood she had ever been flattered. “ Queer thing,” she said to herself, “ if I should prove to be the ugly duckling which turned out in the long run to be a swan ! ”

CHAPTER III.

The Last shall be First.



THE story of the hare and the tortoise is not uncommon in this world, and I suppose the hare was never more sure of success than when in his sleep of sloth he dreamt of victory, and the tortoise never more despairing than when the fatigue of toil slackened his pace before the winning-post. So in reality Laura slept and dreamed, while her sister toiled. Laura *could* do everything, but Mary Anne *did* it. And the reward of reality came in due time. Indeed it was just during Mary Anne's most despairing mood that the effort which had fatigued her into diffidence was on the point of achieving success. Not only at home did they begin to wake to the fact that the hinge of their life had changed, that the real influence was the silent one of the elder sister, not the noisy one of the younger; but the better of their girl acquaintances began actually to prefer Mary Anne to Laura.

Among men, there is always a class more versed in ladies' affairs than in that which is manly, and

they are despised by their own sex in consequence, no matter how popular they may become with the other ; and sometimes it is amusing to see the puzzled expression of some fair admirer when the enthusiastic praise of one of these ladies' men is received with a dose of cold water. Doubtless among women there is a corresponding class, not so open of course, for fear of Mrs. Grundy, but quite as decided ; and girls who are popular with the other sex are not always popular with their own. I do not say that Laura flirted ; but her external attractiveness certainly caused her to lay herself out for appreciation where she could get most of it, and the result was that she sacrificed many womanly graces for men's flattery.

"What has come over Laura Jackson?" said one of a knot of girls one day, when the two sisters had just departed.

"Oh, I don't know : she has got awfully stuck up lately."

"Well, I shouldn't say it was exactly stuck up, but she certainly keeps a great deal to herself."

"To herself? Laura keep to herself!"

"Oh, of course I mean as far as girls are concerned."

"Ah, I was going to say——."

"Well, what were you going to say?"

"Oh, nothing at all : only, if by keeping to oneself you meant flirting——."

"Now, now, now ; let's have no scandal. But it's a fact, you know, I have lately come to like Mary Anne much more than Laura."

"What ! the little one with a snub nose?" said a comparative stranger.

"Fie ! for shame!"

"Why? how am I to describe her, then? What shape is her nose, pray?"

"Well, it's not the Roman type certainly, but you needn't have mentioned it ; she is a very nice girl all the same."

"But she hasn't a word to say for herself."

"True, she's not much in the talking line, but if you ever happen to want a thing done for you, that's where she turns up trumps."

Father Moberley, passing at this moment, heard the last sentence, and put in, "The old moral you know,—'a friend in need is a friend indeed.'"

"Here's Father Moberley with his morals again," said the sauciest of the group ; "I believe, Father, you have a moral for every blessed thing you come across."

"Yes, Miss Imperence, and for a good many unblessed things too,—that's my province, surely, faith *and* morals, isn't it?"

Father Moberley was delighted to hear the moment after (of course they told him without his asking), that the subject of his moral had been Mary Anne. "The perfume of the violet is spreading," he said to himself as he walked away.

There is an instinct which at times seems even keener than the insight of our companions, and that is the instinct of children. Fresh from the hands of God, knowing as yet no guile, the dear young things seem to pierce through mere appearances and unrealities; and if ever you find a man or a woman beloved by children, you may be sure that that man or woman is worthy of your friendship. Laura had long abdicated her supremacy in the hearts of children. The sincere flattery of their devotion had begun to pall, for that which was sweeter elsewhere; and the little things began to attach themselves to the one who showed she really loved them, by entering into their thoughts and amusements, and by doing little things for them that nobody else would do. In counting up the forces which kept Mary Anne in the equilibrium of cheerfulness, perhaps not the least would be found to have been the love of children. Indeed, what is sweeter than a loving child's smile of welcome? If I had worked hard a night and a day, I should think it a more than sufficient reward.

The young men had not found it out yet, but then they are notoriously dull with regard to women. Men generally have their ideal of womanhood, which they deck with all imaginable graces and virtues, and those who at first sight come nearest to their ideal receive most of the consequent homage. The ideal is one of beauty, and physical beauty is the quality most easily perceived; it is astonishing how hard it is for a man to believe evil of a girl who has a beautiful face and form. Therefore Laura won her triumph still; and as it was the triumph she most wanted, she was quite satisfied.

Of the young men who seemed to be paying their court, who tried not to look disappointed when they heard that Laura was not at home, there were some two or three, who, out of mere politeness, were kind to Mary Anne. They talked to her, with a resigned air, about the weather, about her work, about the likelihood of war. Mr. Everston especially, the apparently most devoted suitor of all, used to have compassion on her. When Laura was not there, he used even to endeavour to draw her out into brilliancy; but not with any great success. Laura being present, of course things were different. She would at times monopolise him,—“Mr. Everston this, and Mr. Everston that.” At other times

she would snub the poor man unmercifully, until Mary Anne would think that he must have a good deal of chivalry in him to stand so much.

"Really, it is a shame the way you go on, Laura," she said one day; "why there's that man, the finest match in the whole country round, and a Catholic too, and you treat him sometimes as if he were a slave."

"Oh, never you mind, Mary Anne; I know how to manage my own little affairs. You have no experience in such things, my dear; why, I can whistle that man to me any time I like."

And certainly Mr. Everston must have been very deeply in love to forgive so much, to come so often, and to bear rebuffs so calmly. I suppose there is a natural tyranny in the heart of man, and especially in the heart of woman, or what pleasure could there possibly be in seeing a man suffer simply because he is attached to us? It is probably the sense of power that is so irresistible, and that makes the fascinating coquette play with a victim much as a cat plays with a mouse. I have however sometimes seen the mouse escape, and probably it was mostly for coquettes that the proverb was written, "there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." And so perhaps it may be with Laura.

CHAPTER IV.

A surprise.

IT happened one Sunday that a strange priest preached instead of Father Moberley. He took for his text, "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Mary Anne began to think it was going to be a very uninteresting sermon, when suddenly her attention was riveted by the remark that the flowers of the field were God's commonplaces, while Solomon was unique in the world's magnificence. The preacher went on to show how people in their pride were always striving to be unique, or extraordinary, whereas their real happiness and dignity lay in being content to be in the common run. The Blessed Virgin herself, he said, had had nothing uncommon in her external life; in nature, and in grace, what was commonest was most useful: with a great deal more to the same effect. He might have been talking Greek, as far as Laura was concerned, for she had gone into a dream of

air-castle building very shortly after the text, and only came back at the blessing. Her version was that the sermon was dry.

Mr. Everston joined them as they left the porch, but as several others had anticipated him, and Laura was already monopolised and had no eyes or ears for him, he had to fall back with Mary Anne, who would otherwise have been alone.

"What did you think of the sermon, Mr. Everston?"

"Oh, I don't know; I don't care for people who preach essays." This was rather cruel, for he saw she wanted him to praise it, and only pretended to find fault in order to draw her out.

"Do you really think that?" she said. "Well, it had something of the essay about it too; still, I liked it, though I don't go in much for thinking as a rule."

"Do you think now," he asked in turn, "you could tell me why you liked it?"

Mary Anne reflected for a moment, then merrily said:

"Well, you know, I once read somewhere that we never like anything anyone else says, unless it flatters our pride."

"Pride! Why the whole sermon was against pride."

"Yes, and in favour of the commonplace."

"You mean that you put yourself in the region of the——?"

"Precisely, of the commonplace, Mr. Everston."

"What in the world are you two talking about?" broke in Laura, who had caught a few words while rounding a corner.

"Discussing the sermon, Miss Laura; which I bet you a pair of gloves is more than *you* would venture to do."

"Oh, you're welcome. I always leave such dry topics to Mary Anne; she likes them."

"Then I admire her taste," replied Mr. Everston. The conversation then became general, Laura doing her best to undo the impression she felt her flippancy had made on Mr. Everston's mind.

A few days afterwards, Mr. Jackson received a note from Mr. Everston, asking for an interview. It had been long expected, so caused no surprise. Of course it was plain what he wanted to talk about. An evening was appointed and Laura was smuggled out of the way. When Mr. Everston came, he was shown into the sitting-room; his intimacy in the house did away with the necessity of the drawing-room, and they all preferred this. Mrs. Jackson was there, and Mary Anne was working at the sewing-machine.

"You asked to see me, Mr. Everston, but you know us too well to be embarrassed by Mrs. Jackson's presence,—especially as we cannot pretend not to guess the object of our interview."

"Oh, certainly," said Mr. Everston ; but he gave a nervous glance at Mary Anne.

"You needn't mind her, Mr. Everston," said Mrs. Jackson, "she just works away there, and we go on exactly the same whether she is there or not."

"That's surely one of those things one would rather have left unsaid, isn't it, Mother?" said Mary Anne, preparing to go ; but seeing she could not take her work with her, she first asked, "Am I to go then?"

Mr. Everston looked at her, and in amusement at her simplicity said with a mischievous smile, no, there was no need, she would not embarrass him in the least. So she remained.

Of course the interview was what had been expected. The young man asked Mr. Jackson for his daughter's hand. Things were so straightforward ; it was so evident that he was agreeable to them, that they wondered he should spend so many words over it. Yet on he went : he told them how much he loved her ; he described in glowing terms the many qualities which had made him love her.

Some of them did not seem to fit Laura very well, but all three thought, "Well, love is blind : let us hope they will be happy." Meanwhile the sewing-machine went steadily on. At length Mr. Jackson rose, said that Mr. Everston had his most hearty consent ; indeed he rejoiced to be able to marry his daughter to one who was not only a staunch Catholic living up to his creed, but who had an honoured position in society as well ; and Laura ought to be glad——.

" Laura !" exclaimed Mr. Everston, also springing up, " who said Laura ? I never asked for her."

The sewing-machine suddenly stopped : the work was let fall. Mary Anne gave one look up, turned pale, then fiery red, then rushed from the room. For some time after she paced her bedroom in deepest agitation. She seemed to herself to be walking on air. And over and over again she repeated to herself,—“ To think he meant me all the time ! ”

CHAPTER V.

What everybody expected.

WHILE she was walking up and down in this agitation, there was a tap at the door, and her mother entered.

“Well dear, and what do you say to it all?”

“Mother,” she said, “please don’t ask me yet. I am so taken by surprise that I must have time to think : please don’t ask me to say anything at all about it for a day or so.”

“Very well, my love. You must indeed be surprised, for it is the most extraordinary way of proposing I ever heard of.”

I do not think Mrs. Jackson was quite as pleased as her husband about it. Not that she did not rejoice over Mary Anne’s good fortune (and “Laura can be settled any time, you know,” she had already remarked), but because no woman likes to be so entirely at fault in a matter of this kind. The idea of a mother not seeing when a man has fallen in love with her daughter, though the whole thing has gone on under her very eyes !

However, Mary Anne went on thinking. She saw now what she had never seen before. Many little words and actions received a new meaning. Her path had been lighted all along with love, and she knew it not. All the chivalry she had once credited him with, had been for her sake. It was not, therefore, to be wondered at that her heart should receive a sudden expansion. I trust she will not be thought to be unmaidenly in deciding in five minutes to answer such affection with an affection she had never thought of before. It was in reality that many successive months were taking effect all at once. She saw now, on looking back, that she might have wished this very thing all along, had she thought it possible ; so that really the sudden blaze was but the result of long smouldering, just as sometimes a fire seems to be hardly alight, and yet one touch makes it break out into universal flame. Therefore Mary Anne had no hesitation about that : with her whole heart she wanted to answer yes.

Why then did she want time to think? Let us watch her.

Time passed on. Everyone had retired to rest, when Mary Anne looked out to see if there was a light under Laura's door. There was. She went, and tapping, gently entered. Now, Laura, I must

say, was crying. If she had thought her sister would see her that night, she would have died rather. But she *was* crying, and for many reasons; and she was not in a very good temper either. When Mary Anne therefore entered, Laura resented it; first, because she had been caught crying; and, secondly, because she misjudged her sister's motives. However, she steeled herself for the interview, and said, "Well, Mary Anne, I suppose you are so overjoyed with your unexpected *luck* [with much emphasis on this word], that you couldn't wait till to-morrow for congratulations. Well, I congratulate you I'm sure with all my heart." Then, in nervous haste, for fear of what Mary Anne might say, she went on: "You see I've been crying; but it is not what you think. I am simply angry at you people making such a fool of me. You get me out of the way as if I expected to be proposed to; as if I wanted it! as if I cared one bit! And now he'll go and tell everybody how Laura Jackson had high hopes and got diddled: it's too bad!" Here she had to stop, for all her energies were wanted to repress the rising tears; so Mary Anne found time to say, "Now, please, Laura, don't——."

"Don't what? Don't I know quite well what you came here for? You think you have won a great victory over me, and came here to gloat over

your triumph. You pretended always to think it was my affair, while the whole thing was secretly arranged all along." (It is a way angry girls have got, to make their accusations somewhat inconsistent—just now it was "unexpected *luck*.") "But if you think I am hurt over it, you are greatly mistaken : I don't care one jot."

"No, Laura, it is you are mistaken in me ; please now be reasonable, and I'll tell you what I came for. Think now. I thought, and sincerely thought that Mr. Everston was fond of you. You know, Laura, I never put myself in competition with you. I never dreamt, and can hardly believe now, that anyone could think of me by the side of you. However, it has come to pass, as you know. Laura, I have always been a good sister to you, so don't turn upon me now. I would not do what you just now said in your vexation."

"Well, then, why did you come ?" asked Laura, in mollified, but still sulky tones.

"I came simply to ask your advice. You see, he has spoken, but I have not answered a word, not even to mother ; and I mean to ask you, Laura, now, to help me to decide whether I shall say yes or no."

If Mary Anne had gone suddenly raving, she could not have astonished her sister more.

"Why, of course——," she replied.

"No, Laura," answered the other, "there is no of course about it. Listen. Just now you said you did not care one bit. Now speak heart to heart to me ; for I know that is not the truth. I want to know sincerely whether you really cared for him or not."

"Oh, what is the use of talking like that, Mary Anne? Suppose I did care for him, what then? Do you mean to say you would say no?"

"I would not stand in the way of your love, Laura."

"But would you refuse him?"

"I—think—I—would, Laura ; yes, I would."

Laura was conquered. "You are a dear good thing, Mary Anne ; but you think too much of me. My heart is not so deep as yours, and I shall not suffer. Since you are so true to me, I will tell you honestly that I do care, I am disappointed. But I am very shallow, Mary Anne ; I shall get over it soon, and shall be happy in your happiness. Forgive me, dear ; you are a better girl than I, and I am only sorry I did not always know it."

So the bitterness passed, and only happiness resulted. I need not follow their fortunes further. To tell you the truth, I do not care much about Laura. She married a Mr. Goldworthy, and was

always much thought of, but she never got over her early spoiling ; while Marian, as her husband insisted on her now calling herself ("for, my dear, you are now quite out of the region of the commonplace," he said), Marian I say improved daily.

I only know that it is down in Father Moberley's note-book, that as long as they were in his parish, the little Everstons never showed much affection for Aunt Laura, whereas, the little Goldworthys were never so happy as when they could be near Aunt Marian.

In omnibus glorificetur Deus.

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